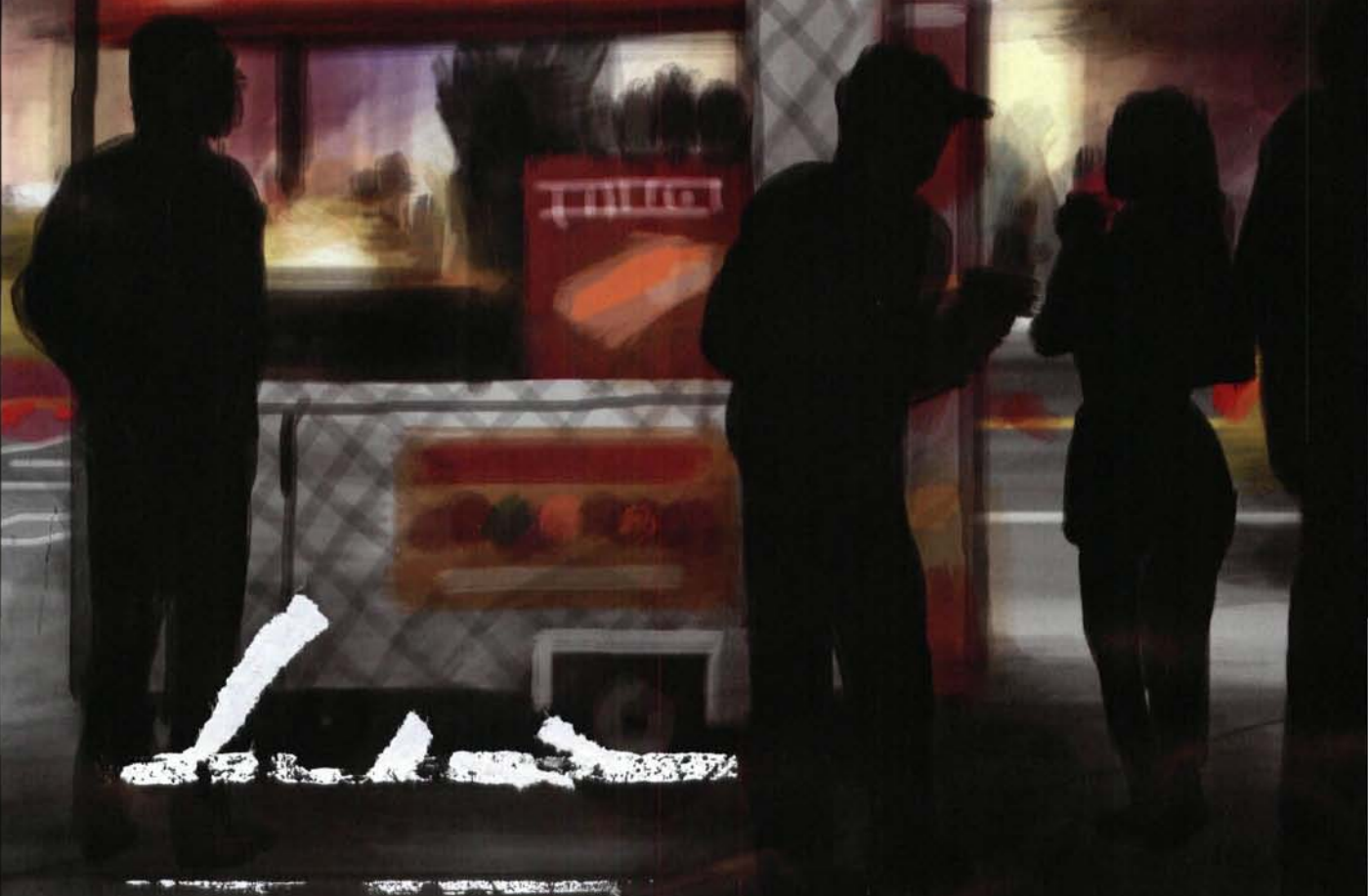


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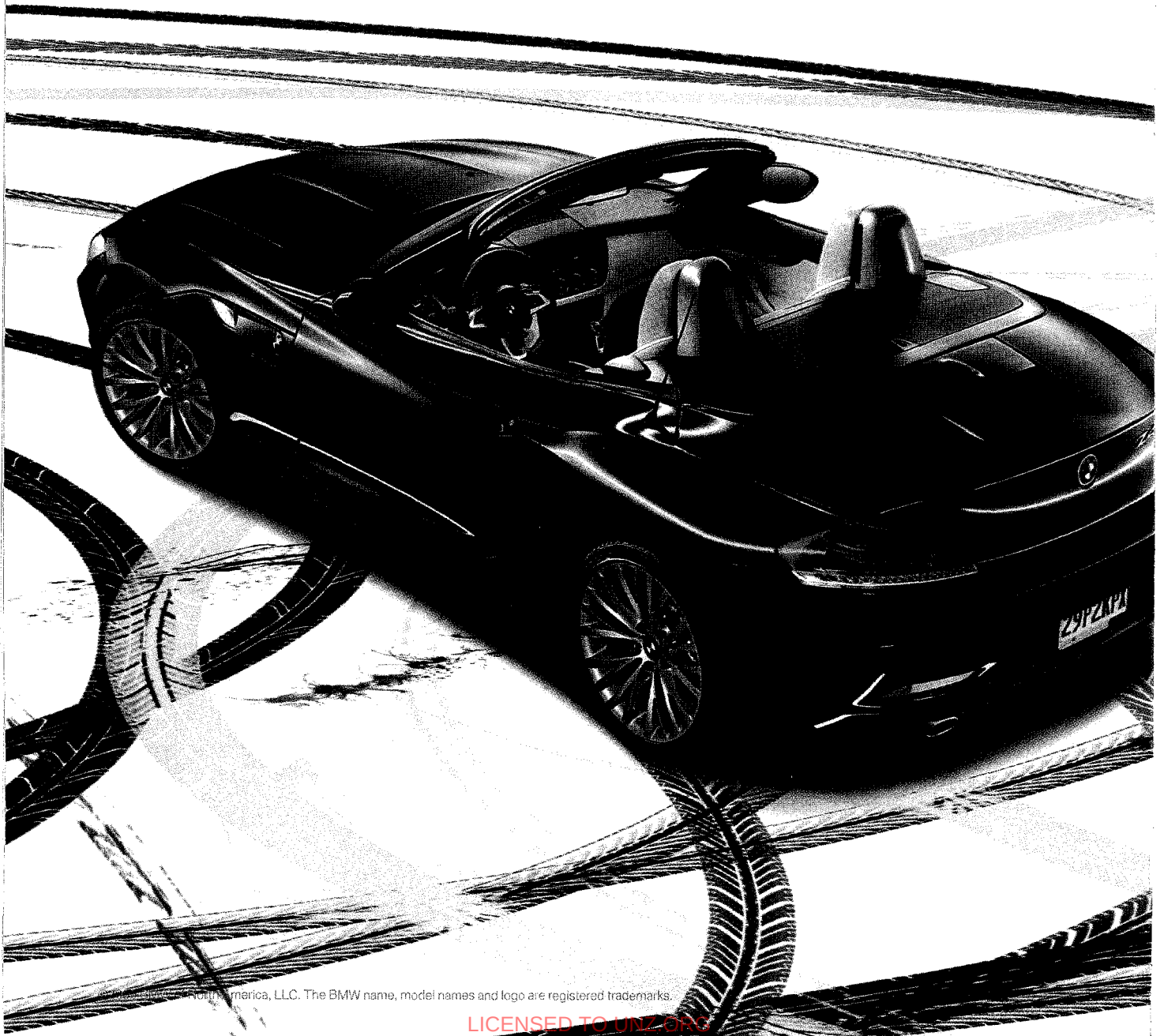
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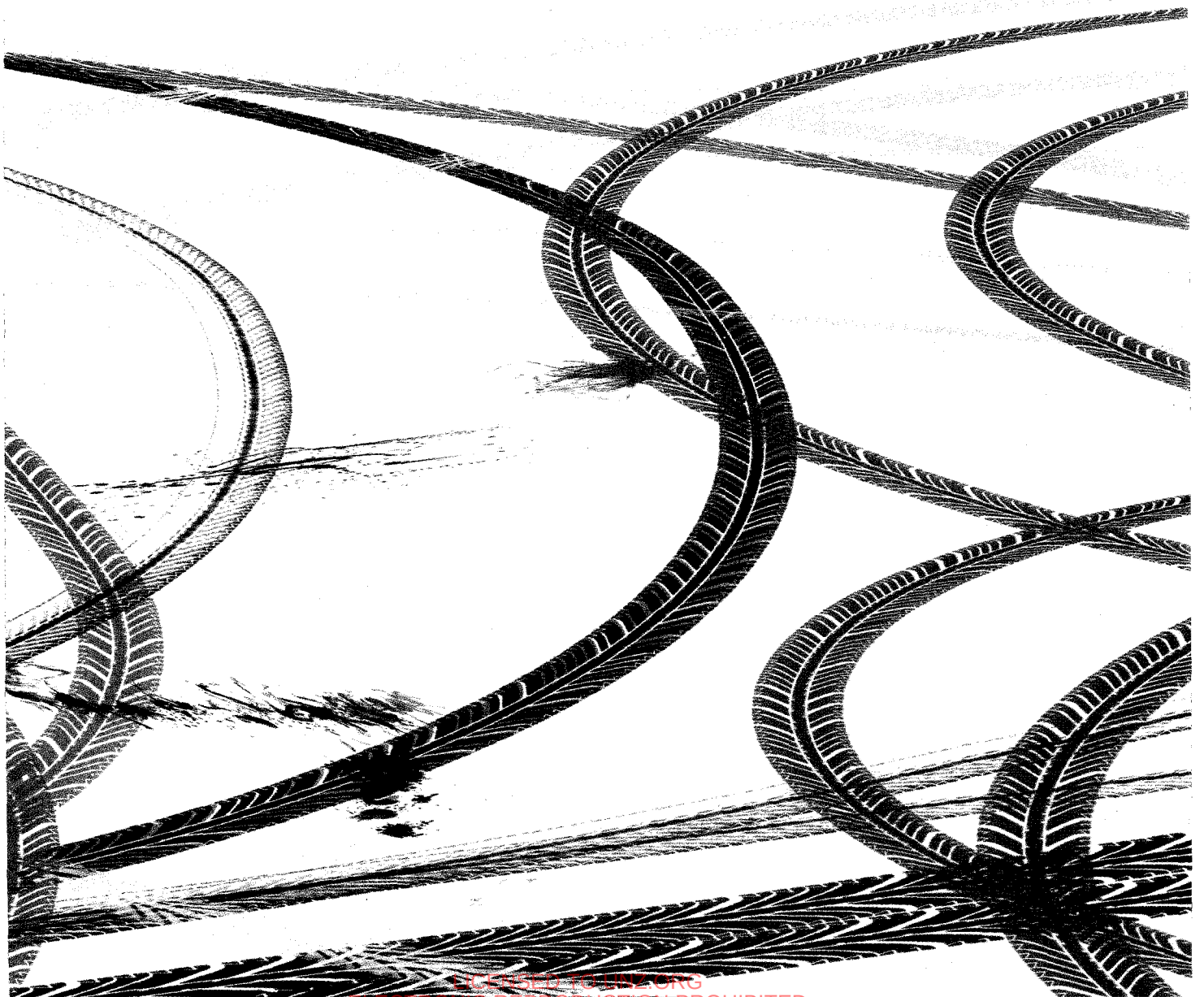
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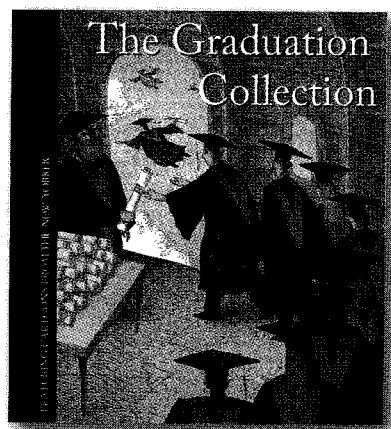
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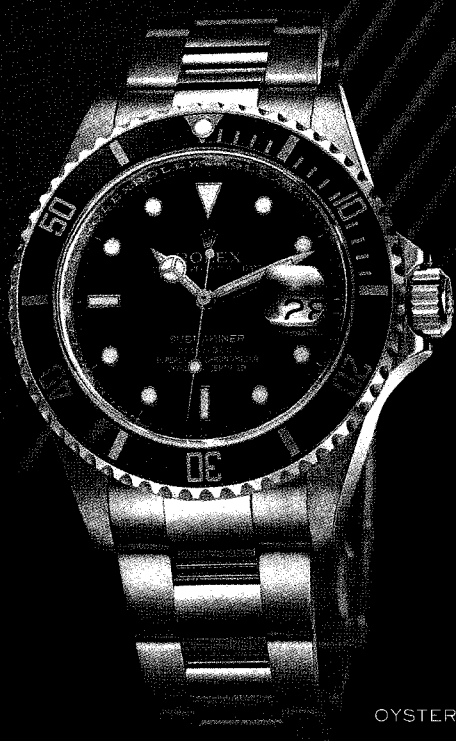
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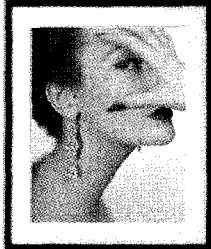
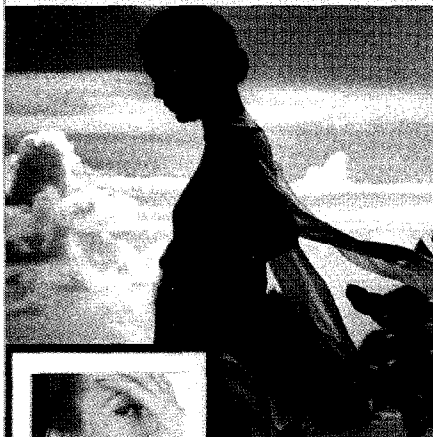
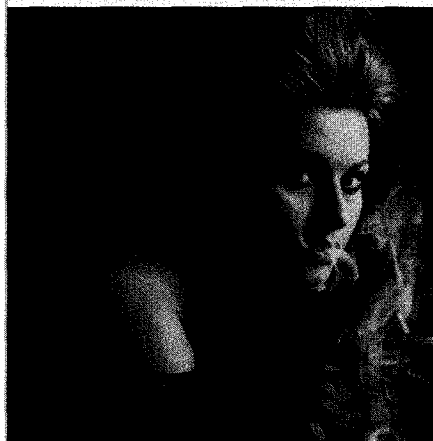
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Calvin Tomkins ("Western Disturbances," p. 68) published "Lives of the Artists," a collection of *New Yorker* Profiles, last October.

Craig Raine (Fiction, p. 76), the editor of *Areté*, is the Richard Ellmann Fellow in English at New College, Oxford. He has two books, "The Divine Comedy," a novel, and "How Snow Falls," a collection of poems, due out next year.

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Jorge Colombo (Cover) is an illustrator, photographer, and graphic designer. The artist created this cover by drawing with his finger on the screen of his iPhone.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio: *Atul Gawande* on health-care costs; *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts the Political Scene, a weekly roundtable. / Video: Watch *Jorge Colombo* draw this week's cover; *John LaBr* in conversation with Geoffrey Rush. / Slide show: *Peter Schjeldahl* on Francis Bacon. / Ask the Author: *Andy Borowitz* takes readers' questions. / Blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg* on politics, *Steve Coll* on the stimulus bill, *James Surowiecki* on the economy, *Richard Brody* on movies, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

SIDE EFFECTS

Margaret Talbot, in writing about the ubiquitous off-label use of prescription drugs like Adderall, Ritalin, and Provigil by bright, healthy young adults seeking cognitive benefits, concludes that "it makes no sense to ban the use of neuroenhancers. Too many people are already taking them, and the users tend to be educated and privileged people who proceed with just enough caution to avoid getting into trouble. . . . In a consumer society like ours, if people are properly informed about the risks and benefits of neuroenhancers, they can make their own choices about how to alter their minds, just as they can make their own decisions about shaping their bodies" ("Brain Gain," April 27th). But the potential medical risks of these stimulants are significant, particularly for some college students who turn to them as study aids and as a way to offset the effects of partying. It might be interesting to investigate whether there has been an increase in alcohol poisoning on campuses that also report a rise in the use of cognitive enhancers. In addition, many drugs' negative effects don't show themselves for years. Will today's twenty-year-old users experience more arrhythmias and other potentially lethal cardiac problems in their forties and fifties than those who never used these stimulants? Until more is known, the nonmedical use of a drug may be doing more harm than good.

*Sally Warner-Arnett
Santa Barbara, Calif.*

Margaret Talbot's fascinating article neglected to mention one potentially devastating effect of stimulant neuroenhancers: in people with a history of, or a yet-to-be manifested tendency toward, bipolar disorder, drugs like Adderall and Ritalin can trigger mania, which may persist even if use of the stimulant is discontinued. And mania, if untreated (or untreatable), can be followed by depression—often severe depression. Bipolar disorder typically begins during or shortly after one's

college-age years, making this very popular time to use these drugs also very dangerous: some of those users might be bipolar and not even know it yet.

*Nomi Lubin
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

THE BOXER

David Denby, in reviewing James Toback's documentary "Tyson," notes that it depicts two incidents of alleged head-butting in fights between Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson, the first of which opened up a cut on Tyson's forehead; the second ended with Tyson biting Holyfield on the ear (The Current Cinema, May 11th). The first head-butt appeared to be accidental, Denby writes. He adds, of the second, "It all happened very quickly, but this time to me the act looked calculated." As co-author of Holyfield's autobiography, I'm certain that the footage, when presented neutrally, shows only inadvertent collisions when Holyfield didn't feel compelled to move his head out of the way just because Tyson expected him to. More important, though, is the film's failure to examine the negative effect on Tyson of Cus D'Amato—who, Denby notes, "indulged him as a lawless teen and disciplined him as a fighter." It was Teddy Atlas, working for D'Amato, who first took Tyson under his wing and gave him stern and protective guidance. D'Amato's obsession with training one last champion before he passed on led to his failure to curb Tyson's excesses and to Atlas's disgusted departure from the camp. Atlas took with him Tyson's last chance to be as good a man as he was a fighter.

*Lee Gruenfeld
Palm Springs, Calif.*

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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31	1	2				

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE OUTSIDE IN

The brash and amusing British rockers Art Brut, who burst on the scene four years ago with two-minute songs bristling with youth and vigor, have a new record, "Art Brut vs. Satan." Produced by the Pixies' Frank Black, it is a slightly more sophisticated effort than their early work (one song tops seven minutes), but it's no less catchy. The group will deploy its high-speed attack on pop culture during a five-night stand at the Mercury Lounge. (See page 13.)

ART MIDDLE WAY

The Met's exhibition "Pen and Parchment: Drawing in the Middle Ages" is the first in-depth survey of drawing in medieval Europe. The fifty or so works include illustrations of warfare made at a Swiss monastery circa 850-925 and the mystical maps created by the eccentric fourteenth-century Italian cleric Opicinus de Canistris. (See page 13.)

DANCE DOWN BY THE RIVER

All eyes will be on Alexei Ratmansky as American

Ballet Theatre unveils "On the Dnieper," his first full-length ballet for the company, where he was recently named artist-in-residence. After two gorgeous works for New York City Ballet ("Russian Seasons" and "Concerto DSCH"), expectations are understandably high. (See page 15.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC SPRING IN THE AIR

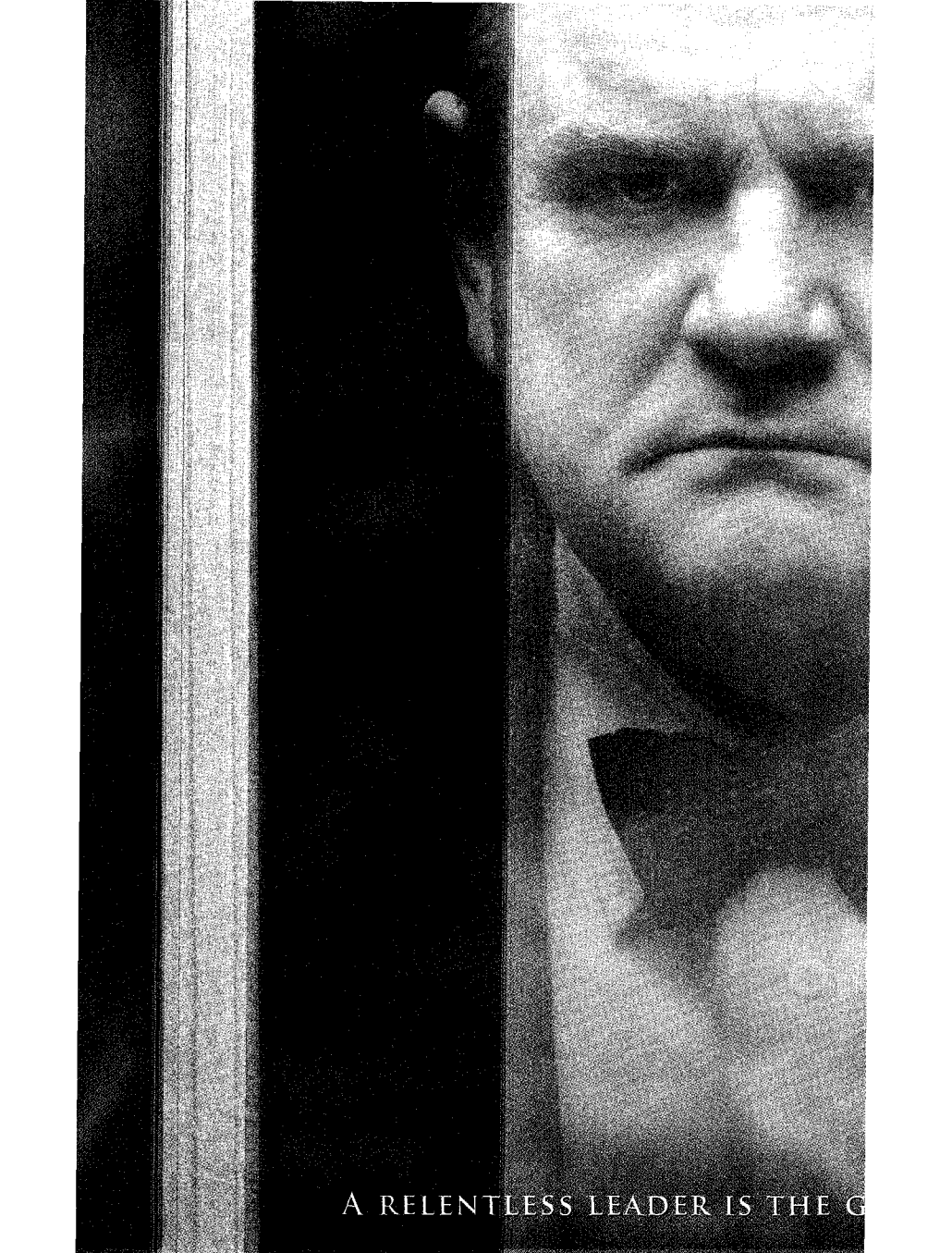
With most of the big groups in abeyance during the late-spring lull, new-music concerts fill the gaps. Among this week's many enticing options is "Green Aria," a "scent opera" with

music by Nico Muhly and Valgeir Sigurdsson, at the Guggenheim Museum. (See page 16.)

MOVIES PEOPLE'S CHOICE

The documentary series "Festival dei Popoli" unspools at Anthology Film Archives, offering an unusual collection of works, new and classic, from filmmakers around the globe, including Albert and David Maysles, Artavazd Pelechian, Agnès Varda, and Robert Gardner. (See page 20.)

The Taste of Tribeca food festival. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.



A RELENTLESS LEADER IS THE G

BRENDAN GLEESON
INTO THE S
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HBO FILMS PRESENTS "MASSIVE" IN ASSOCIATION WITH HBO & SCOTT FREE PRODUCTIONS A RAINMA
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PRODUCED BY ROBERT SCOTT DAVID M. THOMPSON DAVID W. ZUCKER PRODUCED BY FRANK BOELEGER TRACY

SUNDAY MAY

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK SECOND BANANA

Sherie Rene Scott—"one of Broadway's biggest, brightest semi-stars," she smiles with cold teeth—has co-written, with Dick Scanlan, the excellent, well-titled "Everyday Rapture" (at Second Stage). Scott expertly conveys the



internal spiritual drama of an attractive, talented Midwestern Mennonite ("They're nonjudgmental, if you don't mind the shunning thing") struggling to reconcile her upbringing with Broadway's *Destiny of Me*. As she says in a droll, self-deprecating way that's rare in this genre of showing off, "I was searching . . . for a way to be one with God while a lot of other people clapped." Scott has a good voice, backed by a pair of jazzy singers called the Mennonettes, and the show is exceptional for the expertise of its collaborators: Tom Kitt's elegant orchestrations; Christine Jones's zany, eye-catching set; Michele Lynch's clever choreography. Michael Mayer has directed the raffish proceedings to a T. The show won't make Scott a star, but it goes one better: it makes you feel the miraculous in the everyday.

—John Lahr

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AESCLEPIUS

Ellen Stewart wrote and directs this play, based on the violent myth of the god of medicine and healing. Previews begin May 28. Opens May 31. (La Mama, 74 E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

AMERICAS OFF BROADWAY

A festival of plays produced by American regional companies. "Pure Confidence," by Carlyle Brown, from Minneapolis's Mixed Blood Theatre, is in previews, opening May 27. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

CORALINE

Stephin Merritt, of the Magnetic Fields, wrote the music and lyrics for this musical, and David Green-span wrote the book, based on the novel by Neil Gaiman, about a bored, lonely girl who steps into a fantasy world. Jayne Houdyshell stars in the title role. Leigh Silverman directs the MCC Theatre production. In previews. Opens June 1. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

JIMMY

At P.S. 122, a solo play written, directed, and performed by Marie Brassard, about a homosexual hairdresser who lives in people's dreams. Opens May 27. (First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

KING LEAR

In Central Park, New York Classical Theatre celebrates its tenth anniversary with the Shakespeare tragedy, directed by Stephen Burdman. As in years past, the audience follows the show, on foot, around the Park. Also, it's free. Opens May 28. (Enter at 103rd St. and Central Park W. 212-252-4531.)

MAKE ME

At Atlantic Theatre Company, a new comedy by Leslie Ayvazian, about three couples whose relationships are in jeopardy. Christian Parker directs. In previews. Opens May 31. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

NEXT FALL

Naked Angels presents the world première of a new comedy by Geoffrey Nauftts, about a Christian who saves an atheist from choking. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NIGHT SKY

Daniella Topol directs a play by Susan Yankowitz, about an astronomer who develops aphasia following a car accident. In previews. Opens June 2. (Nagelberg Theatre, Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101.)

OUR HOUSE

Michael Mayer directs the New York première of a dark comedy by Theresa Rebeck, about a news anchor who becomes the star of a reality show. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

STRANGERS

Ontological-Hysteric Incubator presents a new play from the Shalimar, written by Nastaran Ahmadi, about a green-card marriage. Shoshona Currier directs. Previews begin May 28. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

STUNNING

LCT3 presents this drama by David Adjmi, about a young Syrian-Jewish woman in Brooklyn who marries a much older man. Anne Kauffman directs. Previews begin June 1. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

10 THINGS TO DO BEFORE I DIE

Zakiyyah Alexander's new play, about two estranged sisters attempting to reconcile, kicks off Second Stage's uptown summer series. Jackson Gay directs. In previews. Opens May 28. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

THINGS OF DRY HOURS

Naomi Wallace wrote this play, about a black Sunday-school teacher who gives shelter to a white refugee. Delroy Lindo and Roslyn Ruff star; Ruben

Santiago-Hudson directs. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

VIEUX CARRE

Austin Pendleton directs the Tennessee Williams play, set in a New Orleans boarding house. In previews. Opens May 27. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

NOW PLAYING

AMERICAN HWANGAP

Although her outgoing, hard-drinking Korean husband, Min Suk (James Saito), abandoned Mary (Mia Katigbak) and their three children many years earlier, she invites him back from Korea to their Texas home for his *hwangap*—his sixtieth birthday—a celebratory time that, astrologically speaking, marks the end of an entire life cycle. As completely as Mary has forgiven Min Suk and is ready to start anew with his "rebirth," her children, David, Esther, and Ralph—all emotionally wrecked—have not, and the few days leading up to the *hwangap* are filled with sad, angry, and awkward encounters. Everything about this production, written by Lloyd Suh and directed by Trip Cullman, is well oiled and professional, but the slickness may detract from the subject matter; what should be messy, dark, and deep comes off as a heartfelt sitcom. (The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

EVERYDAY RAPTURE

Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who moves to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

GROUNDSWELL

At a seaside lodge in South Africa, two employees (Souleymane Sy Savané and the expertly agitated David Lansbury) dream of creating a better life for themselves in the diamond mines along the river. When a wealthy patron (Larry Bryggman) arrives, they plot to make him their investor, a badly hatched plan that soon devolves into a holdup. Ian Bruce's play, directed for the New Group by Scott Elliott, is impressive not only for its sharp character studies but for the effortless way in which it widens its purview from small-time scheming to the politics of restitution, laying bare the growing pains of post-apartheid South Africa as it attempts to inch toward a future unplagued by the past. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MARATHON 2009

This year's festival of new work, presented by the Ensemble Studio Theatre, includes plays by Billy Aronson, Leslie Ayvazian, Jeanne Dorsey, and Garrett M. Brown. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

A MORE PERFECT UNION

Vern Thiessen's two-hander about Supreme Court clerks wrestling with issues political and personal raises more questions than it answers, and not in a good way. Maddie (Melissa Friedman), the child of Russian-Jewish immigrants from Cleveland, clerks for a conservative Justice and believes "the law's the law"; James (Godfrey L. Simmons, Jr.), the scion of a wealthy black family from an Atlanta suburb, clerks for a liberal one and thinks circumstances matter. The actors do yeoman's work, but their roles are mere amalgams: take a pinch of race, a dash of gender, and a dollop of divergent politics, stir in some economic inequality, and the result is two characters who are all mouthpiece and no heart. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

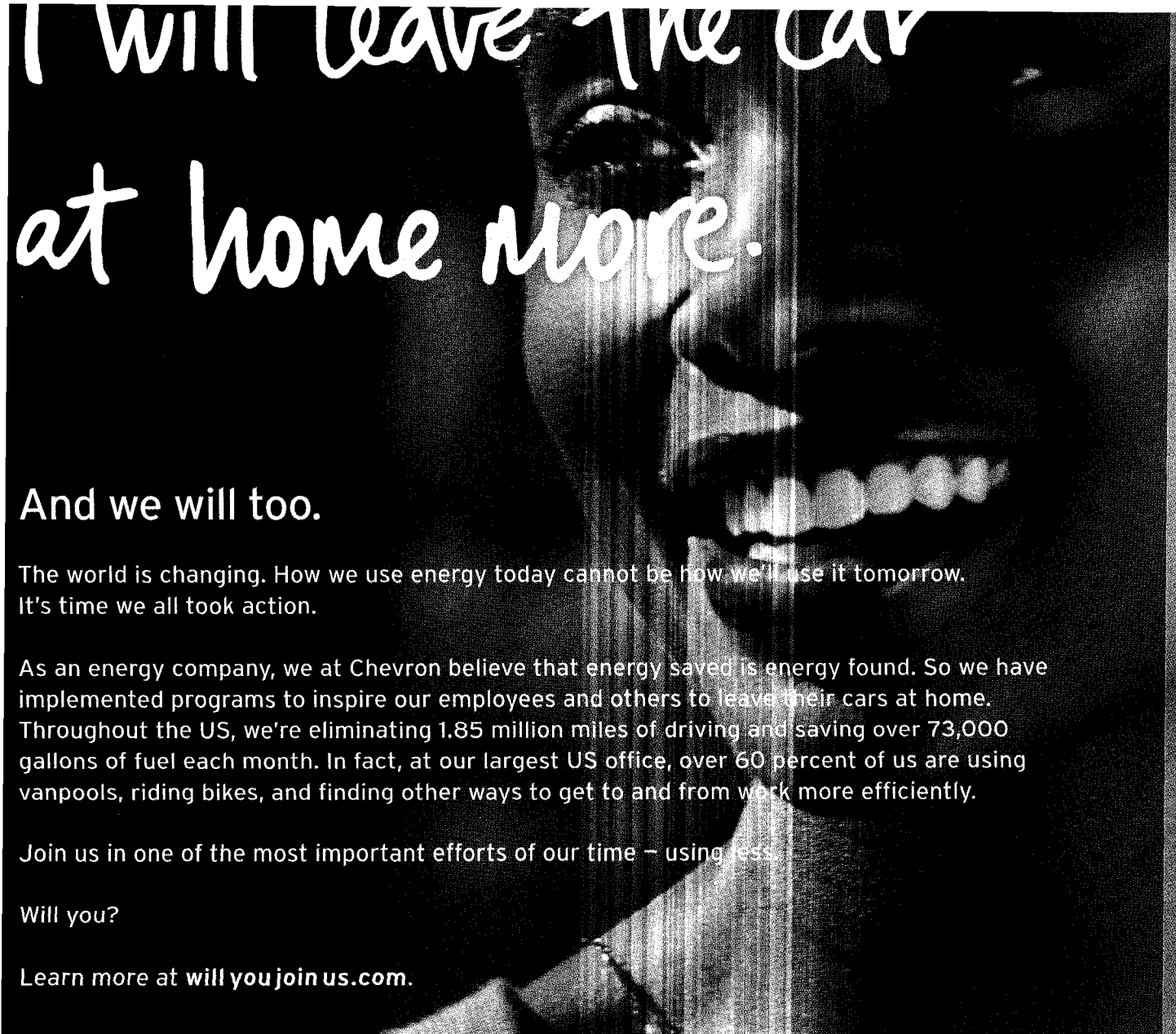
REFLECTIONS: AN EVENING OF SHORT PLAYS

The Resonance Ensemble presents short works by Beckett, Chekhov, Michael Feingold, and others, directed by Eric Parness. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE RIVALRY

Norman Corwin wrote this play, about the 1858 debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. Vincent Dowling directs. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

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THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE (OR, THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS)

Cynthia Hopkins performs in the final installment of her "Accidental Trilogy," which chronicles the adventures of a galaxy-travelling explorer. D. J. Mendel directs. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

THROAT

In Mando Alvarado's engaging if dramaturgically unsound drama, directed by Michael Ray Escamilla, Cesar Rodriguez (the compelling Raul Castillo) is an ex-marine and Iraq-war veteran who has fashioned an incredibly sad but comfortable existence for himself: office temp by day, living in

VOW: Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE:** Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY STUART:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NORMAN CONQUESTS:** Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **REASONS TO BE PRETTY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ROCK OF**

TABLES FOR TWO SOCARRAT

259 W. 19th St. (212-462-1000)—The Moorish conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, beginning in 711 A.D., brought to the inhabitants of the region, which its conquerors renamed Al Andalus, many things: a new religion, Arabic numbers, calligraphy, rice. According to "The Oxford Companion to Food," rice, in the Islamic tradition, was a sacred dish. Later, it evolved into a staple of Spanish cooking, particularly in the form of paella, a casserole that can include any number of things (among them, almost always, saffron and olive oil) and is cooked, without exception, in a two-handled cast-iron pan. In Valencia, where paella is said to have originated, the pan was the table: each person would pull up a chair and carve out a triangle of rice, eating until he met his companions in the middle. At Socarrat, which serves eight versions of the dish at a narrow, stylish bar, under the gaze of the figures in fragmented reproductions of "Las Meninas," the methodology is scattershot but the challenge is the same: every last grain. Handsome waiters are happy to help, and you'll be happy to let them, but scraping the *socarrat*—the caramelized rice at the bottom of the pan—yourself

is a wiser way to win the Clean Pan Club race.

First, though, there is sangria: slightly cinnamon, not too sweet. And there are tapas, satisfying but undistinguished, as befits the cuisine of perhaps the only country in the world where it is desirable to serve food that comes in a can. The hotter plates are the better ones: sizzling *gambas al ajillo*, *canelones* blistered with little bubbles of char. The paellas are meant for two or more, depending on how big you like your piece of the pie. The Valenciana version suffers a bit for its lack of saffron and a surfeit of grease; here, the nuggets of rabbit loin are the buried treasure. The Paella Socarrat is a livelier mélange, incorporating chicken, fish, beef, shrimp, mussels, clams, and—why not?—green beans. The duelling spoons stay on for *graxonera* cheesecake, a cause for a creamy fight to the death in a cast-iron pan. *Fideuas*—one with mussels, another with shrimp—substitute crispy noodles for rice as the underpinning element. What if the Moors had made it to China? (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Paellas \$18-\$23 per person.)

—Lauren Collins



a tent and caring for pigeons by night, all the while coping with severe post-traumatic stress disorder and a vast loneliness. One night, at a bar, he picks up a troubled stranger (Lilli Zaunner), who, in one of many odd twists, turns out to be not only his new therapist but also haunted—literally—by the same ghost that plagues him. Despite patches of deft writing, a seductive use of the unusual stage space, and strong performances by the cast, the play is ultimately doomed by plot inconsistencies and impossibilities. (INTAR, 500 W. 52nd St. 212-695-6134. Through May 30.)

Also Playing

ACCENT ON YOUTH: Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **EXIT THE KING:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GUYS AND DOLLS:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **I HAVE BEEN TO HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR:** Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444. Through May 30. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **IRENA'S**

AGES: Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **RUINED:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WAITING FOR GODOT:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL 237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—May 28: A night of reggae with the Kingston native Gregory Isaacs, the Cool Ruler himself. May 31: The Tubes, who came out of San Francisco in the seventies, were a high-concept band from the start. Led by Fee Waybill, the group put on shows that were in-your-face performance satires, mixing glam, metal, and punk with semi-nudity and soft-core action. They were video-ready but about five years ahead

of the MTV curve; still, they cracked the charts with "Talk to You Later," "Don't Touch Me There," and "She's a Beauty." June 1: The swamp rock of the Louisiana vocalist and pianist Marcia Ball. June 2: Neil Innes, the crown prince of British rock spoofery, formed the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band with his art-school mates in the mid-sixties, wrote the songs for "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (he was known as the seventh Python), and, most brilliantly, teamed up with Eric Idle to create the Rutles. For "All You Need Is Cash" (1978), a perfect mockumentary chronicling the rise and fall of the Rutles, a Liverpoolian pop group, Innes wrote and produced all twenty songs, and co-starred as the Lennon-esque Ron Nasty.

THE BELL HOUSE

149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—May 30: The Chicago post-rock pioneers Tortoise, who have nearly two decades of experience under their belt, are back with their first album of new material in five years. Drawing from a slew of idioms, the band continues to deliver surprising takes on dub, techno, and atonal minimalist punk. The local avant-folkster Ben Vida (performing as Bird Show) opens. June 1: Death Vessel, a very loose collective of musicians orbiting around the singer-songwriter Joel Thibodeau, is not, contrary to its name, a heavy-metal band but, rather, an endearingly off-kilter group with country and folk leanings. Thibodeau's piercing vocals lend the group distinction. With Grant Hart, formerly the drummer for the iconic American punk trio Hüsker Dü.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—May 29-31: In the nineteen-eighties, the Los Angeles-based X was California's preeminent punk band. No one could match the feral rockabilly riffs of the guitarist Billy Zoom, the skewed harmonies of the vocalist Exene Cervenka and the bassist John Doe, and the tub-thumping drumming of D. J. Bonebrake. Together, they unashamedly embraced elements of roots, folk, pop, and country while the rest of the punk scene strove for monochromatic malice. Since those days, X has evolved to become one of the American underground's most beloved and influential acts.

CAKE SHOP

152 Ludlow St. (212-253-0036)—May 30: The Philadelphia power trio Stinking Lizaveta comes to town at the tail end of a monthlong tour celebrating the release of an intense new record, "Sacrifice and Bliss." The band, which takes its name from a mute character in Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov," plays heavy instrumental rock that meshes complicated and precise prog-rock passages, gloomy riffs in the Black Sabbath vein, and occasional free-jazz blowouts. Led by the melodic guitar playing of Yanni Papadopoulos and backed by a frenetic rhythm section made up of Papadopoulos's brother Alexi, on bass, and the drummer Cheshire Augusta, the group has been a linchpin in the vibrant West Philly underground since its founding, fifteen years ago. They are uncompromising in the best sense of the word.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—May 28: Chickenfoot is a deceptively named supergroup that pairs the acrimoniously deposed Van Halen members Sammy Hagar and Michael Anthony with the powerhouse Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith and the fleet-fingered guitar wizard Joe Satriani. As would be expected from such a combination, the band plays a robust blend of rock at high decibels. June 2: The metal band Isis makes music that's imbued with lengthy, ambient passages. The band's latest album, "Wavering Radiant," is equal parts raging guitar maelstrom and contemplative, cinematic sprawl.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—June 1: Last year, Lykke Li, a shining star in the recent influx of infectious Swedish popsters, released a debut album, "Youth Novels," which was a minimalist gem. Produced and co-written by Björn Yttling (of Peter, Björn, and John), the record is a long way from Abba. The arrangements are frequently stunning, but it's the interplay between Li's confidence and her fragile, childlike voice that grabs your attention.

JESSIE WENDER

"I never thought
it could happen
to me.
A heart attack at 53."

~Steve A.
New York, NY
Heart attack: 1/9/2008



"I had been feeling fine. But turns out my cholesterol and other risk factors* increased my chance of a heart attack. Now I trust my heart to Lipitor. Talk to your doctor about your risk and about Lipitor."

- Adding Lipitor may help, when diet and exercise are not enough. Unlike some other cholesterol-lowering medications, Lipitor is FDA-approved to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in patients with several common risk factors, including family history, high blood pressure, low good cholesterol, age and smoking.
- Lipitor has been extensively studied with over 16 years of research. And Lipitor is backed by 400 ongoing or completed clinical studies.

*Patient's risk factors include age, gender, smoking, and high blood pressure.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: LIPITOR is a prescription drug. It is used in patients with multiple risk factors for heart disease such as family history, high blood pressure, age, low HDL ('good' cholesterol) or smoking to reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and certain kinds of heart surgeries. When diet and exercise alone are not enough, LIPITOR is used along with a low-fat diet and exercise to lower cholesterol.

LIPITOR is not for everyone. It is not for those with liver problems. And it is not for women who are nursing, pregnant or may become pregnant. If you take LIPITOR, tell your doctor if you feel any new muscle pain or weakness. This could be a sign of rare but serious muscle side effects. Tell your doctor about all medications you

take. This may help avoid serious drug interactions. Your doctor should do blood tests to check your liver function before and during treatment and may adjust your dose. The most common side effects are gas, constipation, stomach pain and heartburn. They tend to be mild and often go away.

LIPITOR is one of many cholesterol-lowering treatment options that you and your doctor can consider.

Please see additional important information on next page.



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tablets



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Call 1-888-LIPITOR (1-888-547-4867) or visit www.lipitor.com/steve

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IMPORTANT FACTS



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atorvastatin calcium
tablets

(LIP-ih-tore)

LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

With the help of your doctor and a cholesterol-lowering medicine like LIPITOR, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your cholesterol.

Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:

- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:

- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients who have risk factors for heart disease such as:

- age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-C, heart disease in the family, *or*
- diabetes with risk factor such as eye problems, kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems.** Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Headache
- Constipation
- Diarrhea, gas
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Rash
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:

- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
- Talk to your pharmacist.
- Go to www.lipitor.com or call 1-888-LIPITOR.



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MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—May 29: *Girls Girls Girls*, an all-female Mötley Crüe cover band (the name comes from the Crüe's fourth album), have tight leather pants, big hair, and pumped-up aggression, just like their heavy-metal heroes, June 1-5: *Art Brut*. Fresh off the release of a new album, "Art Brut vs. Satan," which was produced by the Pixies' Frank Black, the British band settles in for a five-night run.

MONSTER ISLAND

128 River St., at Metropolitan Ave., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (No phone)—May 28: Nervously jangling out of Detroit, Tyvek plays skittish punk and garage rock. If the group's lo-fi sound seems thrown together and careless, keep in mind that maniacal anthems like "Frustration Rock" need not be handled with an overly professional touch. May 29: Until recently, if you stopped in at the hipster footwear emporium Shoe Market, in Williamsburg, there was a good chance that you'd see at least one member of the Wild Yaks patiently waiting on a leggy customer. To this day, if you stop by one of their increasingly legendary live shows you'll see a fearless performance, a barely controlled tumult. The band's leader, Rob Bryn, has one rule for the group, which traffics in rough-hewn country, blues, and rock: everyone must sing and everyone must play. (For more information about Monster Island, visit toddpnyc.com.)

RODEO BAR

375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (212-683-6500)—May 28: The Chandler Travis Philharmonic. The irreverent guitarist, singer, composer, and show-business veteran Travis, who lives on Cape Cod and has been known to perform barefoot and in his pajamas, swings by with a slightly scaled-down version of his big band. Travis's playful songs often mix mind-bending lyrics with Dixieland jazz, shimmering rock, and horn-fueled R. & B. This show features a preview from his forthcoming solo album, "After She Left," his first in more than a decade. The group will be joined by the jazz trombonist Art Baron for this show.

SULLIVAN HALL

214 Sullivan St., between Bleecker and W. 3rd Sts. (212-634-0427)—May 28: Eric Lindell sings in a soulful, raspy voice that has echoes of Jeff Buckley, but with shadings of R. & B. It's a style that has earned him a record deal with the blues label Alligator (his third release for the company, "Gulf Coast Highway," just came out) and has made him popular on the West Coast and in his adopted city, New Orleans.

TOWN HALL

123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—May 28-29: The triumphant harmonies of the Brooklyn indie-rock outfit Grizzly Bear find a welcoming setting in this fine old theatre.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—May 26-June 6: The British singer Claire Martin and the pianist Richard Rodney Bennett present "Witchcraft," a celebration of the songwriter Cy Coleman, whose standards include "The Best Is Yet to Come" and "I'm Going to Laugh You Right Out of My Life."

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—May 26-30: Nearly fifty years after polarizing listeners with his free-jazz squalls, the saxophonist Pharoah Sanders has attained classic status as a soulful, passionate stylist.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—May 28: Cecil Taylor, who is eighty, remains a startling pianist. His determination to remain true to his alternative vision is as inspiring to his fans as it is daunting to the uninitiated. May 29-31: Frank Sinatra, Jr. The Chairman of the Board's talented yet perennially in-the-shadows son sings the songs of his father.

CAFÉ CARLYLE

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through May 30: Judy Collins has made a seamless transition from folk deity to cabaret icon. Her high artistry and disarming candor translate well to an intimate room.

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—May 28-31: Expanding on the genre-mingling fusion of Miles Davis, the Miles from India project brings together American jazz players and Indian musicians. The revolving musical cast includes the guitarist Pete Cosey, the saxophonists Rudresh Mahanthappa and Dave Liebman, and the sitarist Hidayat Khan. Nicholas Payton (the first two nights) and Tim Hagans (the second two) share duties on trumpet. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator Les Paul.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—May 28-30: Four premier mainstream clarinetists—Buddy DeFranco, Ken Peplowski, Bob Wilber, and Victor Goines—pay tribute to Benny Goodman in honor of his hundredth birthday, backed by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. A re-creation of the King of Swing's historic 1938 Carnegie Hall concert will be a centerpiece of the evening.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—May 26-27: The Ron Miles quartet. The Denver-based trumpeter Miles, a frequent (and daring) cohort of the guitarist Bill Frisell, is joined by another brave improviser, the pianist Jason Moran. May 28-31: The trombonist and conch-shell master Steve Turre has assembled a first-rate sextet, with the trumpeter Christian Scott, the bassist Ray Drummond, the saxophonist Ron Blake, the pianist Xavier Davis, and the brilliant drummer Ignacio Berroa.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—May 26-31: The veteran drummer Al Foster settles in with a quartet featuring the saxophonist Eli Digibri, the bassist Doug Weiss, and the pianist Adam Birnbaum. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective." Through Aug. 16. ♦ "Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600." Through June 21. ♦ "The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984." Through Aug. 2. ♦ "Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom." Through Oct. 25. ♦ "The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion." The Costume Institute's latest extravaganza expands to include fashion photography. Pictures by Penn and Avedon open the exhibition, and two of the latter's most memorable images have been re-created in sculptural installations with mannequins in the original couture gowns. Throughout the show, which covers the years 1947-97, star personalities—from Dovima and Veruschka to the posse of "supers" who dominated the late nineteen-eighties—are name-checked and featured on magazine covers and in spreads, as well as in framed prints by Horst, Hiro, Helmut Newton, David Bailey, Steven Meisel, Peter Lindbergh, and others. Elaborate dioramas, video projections, and a soundtrack for each decade tend to compete for the viewer's attention, but the photographs allow us to contemplate the fraught symbiosis between artist and model. Through Aug. 9. ♦ "Pen and Parchment: Drawing in the Middle Ages." Opens June 2. ♦ "African and Oceanic Art from the Barbier-Mueller Museum, Geneva: A Legacy of Collecting." Opens June 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West." Through June 8. ♦ "Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection." Through Jan. 4. ♦ "Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel." Through June 15. ♦ "Aernout Mik." Through July 27. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"Intervals: Julieta Aranda." Through July 19. ♦ "Frank Lloyd

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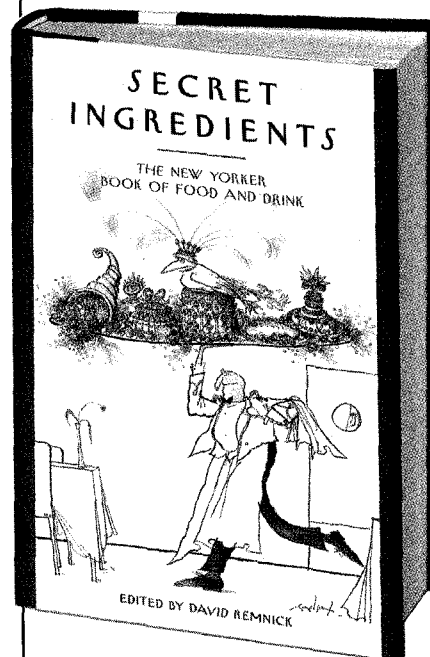
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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK LENS CRAFTER

Sigmar Polke's "Lens Paintings," at the Michael Werner gallery, are a potlatch for fans of the mercurial German master. While executing a major project of stained-glass (and sliced-stone) windows for Zurich's Grossmünster Cathedral,



Polke has also been making eccentric paintings that recycle nearly a half century's worth of his motifs and ideas in a gorgeous guise. Most of the supports are vertically ridged sheets of semi-transparent, hand-cast resin, with the consistency of antique glass. Their form is lenticular, yielding effects of flickering animation when your viewpoint shifts. Working on the ridges—and at times on surfaces mounted behind them—Polke deploys an indescribable abundance of figurative and abstract imagery and painterly techniques. Each of the pictures (there are twenty-six here) is one of a kind. Some are anamorphic: distorted images snap to attention when eyed from certain angles. The show breaks down the familiar repertoire of Polke's wondrous imagination and reassembles it into something like Heaven.

—Peter Schjeldahl

Wright: From Within Outward." Through Aug. 23. ♦ "Learning by Doing." Through Aug. 23. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect." Through May 31. ♦ "Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films." Through Aug. 30. ♦ "Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen: The Music Room." Through Aug. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours." Through July 5. ♦ "Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea." Through July 5. ♦ "Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video." Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future." Through Aug. 16. ♦ "Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time." Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—"The Treasures of Ulysses Davis." Through Sept. 6. ♦ "Up Close: Henry Darger." Through Sept. 6. ♦ "Kaleidoscope Quilts: The Art of Paula Nadelstern." Through Sept. 13. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
556 W. 22nd St. (212-255-0719)—"Modern Modern." Through June 13. (Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—"Unica Zürn: Dark Spring." Through July 23. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"Avedon Fashion 1944-2000." Through Sept. 6. ♦ "David Seidner: Paris Fashions, 1945." Through Sept. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker." Through Aug. 2. ♦ "They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust." Through Oct. 1. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"New at the Morgan: Acquisitions Since 2004." Through Oct. 18. ♦ "Creating the Modern Stage: Designs for Theater and Opera." Through Aug. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art." Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913." Through June 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus." Through July 5. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN
Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx (718-817-8700)—"Georg Ehret: The Greatest Botanical Artist of the 1700s." Through July 19. ♦ "The Glory of Dutch Bulbs: A Legacy of 400 Years." Through June 7. ♦ "The Heirloom Tomato: An Exhibition of Photographs by Victor Schragar." Through Sept. 13. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—"Tarjama / Translation." Through Sept. 27. ♦ "Johanna Unzueta: Iron Folklore." Through Sept. 27. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—"The University of Trash." Through Aug. 3. ♦ "Rashid Johnson: Smoke and Mirrors." Through Aug. 3. (Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)
STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit." Through June 28. ♦ "Collected: Propositions on the Permanent Collection." Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

HELEN LEVITT

The great New York street photographer, who died in March, at the age of ninety-five, left behind an extraordinary and endlessly engaging body of work, the best known examples of which were made in the nineteen-forties. Children were Levitt's most famous subjects, and her vivacious pictures of urchins at play spark this memorial show. But she was just as alert to the presence of crones and codgers on tenement stoops and—in a rarely exhibited series taken with Walker Evans's camera—riders on the subway. The complete range of her activity is laid out in a wonderful room of very small early prints, shown here for the first time, ample evidence of Levitt's shrewd, sympathetic, unblinking eye. Through June 26. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

"RAY JOHNSON: DALI, WARHOL, AND OTHERS"

The reclusive Pop-era collagist, who committed suicide in 1995, felt a deep kinship with Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Andy Warhol, among others. (Johnson was mugged in Manhattan on the same day that Valerie Solanas shot Warhol.) The show traces the web of influence with meticulous care. A Warhol screen print of the "Mona Lisa"—also one of Duchamp's signature images—is exhibited alongside Johnson's collage of the same subject. A reproduction of a Dali Crucifixion becomes the background for a black-comic work, with the grinning cartoon character Nancy in the role of Jesus. In this canonical company, Johnson's copy of "The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dali," open to the underlined phrase "there is no such thing as chance," reads like a vindication for the man once called "the most famous unknown artist in New York." Through July 31. (Feigen, 34 E. 69th St. 212-628-0700.)

Short List

CAROL BOYE: Horticultural Society of New York, 148 W. 37th St. 212-757-0915. Through Sept. 10. **DEBBIE FLEMING CAFFERY:** Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868. Through July 31. **ALICE NEEL:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through June 20. **ERNESTO NETO:** Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-616-3930. Through June 14. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through May 30. **SIGMAR POLKE:** Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through June 19. **MIMMO ROTELLA:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through July 31. **ANRI SALA / YANG FUDONG:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through June 20. **JACK YOUNGERMAN:** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-6780. Through June 26. **"SACRED ARCHITECTURE IN THE AMERICAS":** Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059. Through June 20.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SARAH CHARLESWORTH

Charlesworth, who is also represented in the Met's current "Pictures Generation" exhibition, shows slick

color photographs that collapse the distinction between art and art direction. For "Work in Progress," she shoots artmaking tools—rulers, picture frames, a T-square, a camera on a tripod—in high-impact primary colors. Each item is given a graphic treatment, often flat and posterlike, which plays up shapes in silhouette. Though not as allusive or resonant as Charlesworth's earlier work, the photographs are clean, cool, and immensely appealing. A little too easy, perhaps, but there's plenty of time for knottier stuff. Through June 13. (Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111.)

BEATE GUTSCHOW

Gutschow's black-and-white photographs of what appear to be abandoned housing projects and decrepit office blocks suggest Alphaville in ruins—the idealized, streamlined future now just a grimy wasteland. Digitally cobbled together from hundreds of images of real buildings and barren landscapes, the large-scale prints are only momentarily convincing as actual places, but that moment is enough to hook you. The pedestrian plazas and concrete stairwells are mostly deserted, and the few figures who wander into the ghost towns look as derelict as the architecture that dwarfs them. Because too many modern cities already look much like this, Gutschow's fantasies are all the more unsettling. Through July 31. (Sonabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

JESSICA STOCKHOLDER

Stockholder was left out of "Unmonumental," the New Museum's inaugural show of assemblage-based sculpture, but the fifty-year-old artist helped pioneer the approach, whose roots reach back through Rauschenberg's "Combines" to Dada. (The tendency may now have its strongest and strangest expression in the work of Rachel Harrison.) Her new, nonchalantly precise arrangements of everyday stuff—fake fur, socks, plastic bowls, a surfboard, a lamp, a plastic shower curtain—look both unsinkably fresh and supremely formal. Stockholder is a colorist as much as a sculptor, and this show could be the handiwork of the love child of Matisse and Duchamp. Through June 13. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

CHEYNEY THOMPSON

Thompson's new canvases look crisply formulaic. Abstract, two-tone patterns on white backgrounds reproduce close-up views of the linen on which they are painted. The shapes tick off a familiar range of formats, from the classical (horizontal, vertical, diptych, tondo) to the modern (angle, cutout, lozenge). Conceptually, the paintings are as intricate as a chess game. A press release is required reading—the odds that viewers will connect the dots on their own are slim to nonexistent. It interweaves references to Robert Macaire (the fictional French libertine immortalized by Henri Daumier in a series of caricatures), Albert Munsell's three-part color system, and Thatcherism. The text appears on the page in the shape of a three-bladed fan, as if to acknowledge the blowing of some very cool air. Through June 20. (Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

Short List

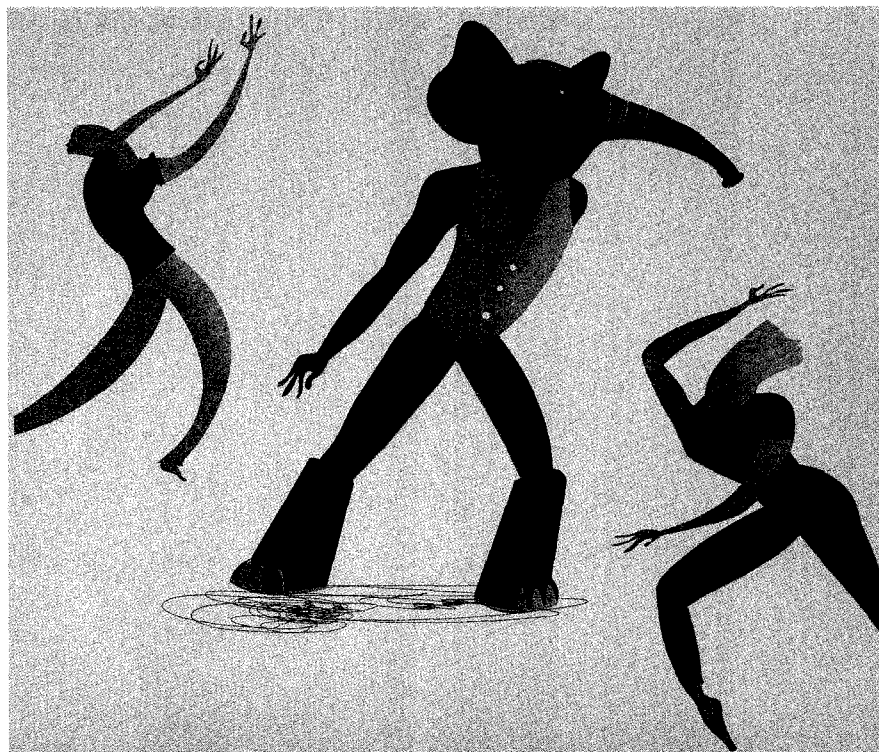
CHRIS MARKER: Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through July 31. **MICHAELA MEISE:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through June 20. **ALICE NEEL:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through June 20. **ALBERT OEHLER:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through May 30. **PABLO PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **CHARLES RAY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through June 27. **LARA SCHNITGER:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through June 20. **BILLY SULLIVAN:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through June 6. **"SLOUGH":** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Opens May 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CARRIE MOYER

Imagine Helen Frankenthaler and Philip Taaffe bumbling a ride with the Van Dykes on a trip to see the Venus of Willendorf. Moyer channels a delirious

range of cultural sources (Elton John's "Tiny Dancer" and George Antheil's "Ballet Mécanique" both crop up in her titles) in big paintings that are unabashedly decorative and slyly feminist. Art history—Matisse cutouts, stain painting—goes toe to toe with prehistory in works like "Rapa Nui Smashup"; hard-edged fields of matte brown and gray open into translucent veils of glitter-laced saffron and peacock blue. Symmetrical compositions play Rorschach-like games (medieval armor, vaginal anatomy, and glazed vases all spring to mind). At times, the humor feels forced—a red-and-white target conflates Kenneth Noland and big-box retail—but Moyer's confidence inevitably wins out. Through June 7. (Canada, 55 Chrystie St. 212-925-4631.)



Lionel Popkin's "There Is an Elephant in This Dance," at Danspace Project.

Short List

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE: Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through May 30. **LIZ DESCHENES:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through June 14. **ALBERTO GIACOMETTI:** Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through June 27. **SCOTT GRODESKY:** Sunday L.E.S., 237 Eldridge St. 212-253-0700. Through June 14. **KARL HAENDEL:** Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through June 20. **MICHELLE HANDELMAN:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through May 31. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through June 13. **BANKS VIOLETTE:** Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219. Through June 20.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

As the poetic lead in Jerome Robbins's "Opus 19/The Dreamer," Gonzalo Garcia has shown great eloquence, lyricism, and insight. This week, the ballet—which Robbins created for Baryshnikov—will be performed alongside Balanchine's "Vienna Waltzes," the virtuoso pas de deux "Allegro Brillante," and "Chaconne," a meditation on courtly and heavenly love, set to music from Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice." ♦ May 27 at 7:30 and May 31 at 3: "Swan Lake," "Opus 19/The Dreamer," and "Vienna Waltzes." ♦ May 28 at 8: "Allegro Brillante," "Opus 19/The Dreamer," and "Swan Lake." ♦

May 29 at 8 and June 2 at 7:30: "Donizetti Variations," "Stabat Mater," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." ♦ May 30 at 2: "Chaconne," "Opus 19/The Dreamer," and "Vienna Waltzes." ♦ May 30 at 8: "Donizetti Variations," "Hallelujah Junction," "A Simple Symphony," and "Swan Lake." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 21.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

A.B.T. premieres "On the Dnieper," by its recently named artist-in-residence, Alexei Ratmansk, set to a 1932 score by Prokofiev. It is a tale of unrequited love, set in Ukraine just after the First World War; the first cast is led by Veronika Part in the tragic role of Natalia, Paloma Herrera as her youthful rival Olga, Marcelo Gomes as the man who is torn between the

two, and David Hallberg as the wronged fiancé. Preceding that is a weeklong run of the rollicking pirate caper "Le Corsaire," a Sovietized Petipa ballet. On Tuesday, look for the boyish Angel Corella as the slave, and, at the Wednesday matinee, the young soloist Cory Stearns, in the role of the love-struck pirate. ♦ May 26 and May 28 at 7:30, May 27 at 2 and 7:30, May 29 at 8, and May 30 at 2 and 8: "Le Corsaire." ♦ May 30 at 11:30 A.M.: "ABTKids." ♦ June 1 at 7:30: "Désir," "On the Dnieper," and "Prodigal Son." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 11.)

MOMIX

"Go green" is the message of "Botanica," Moses Pendleton's newest work for his troupe of illusionist dancers, at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 26-27 at 7:30, May 28-29 at 8, May 30 at 2 and 8, and May 31 at 2 and 7:30.)

"BECKY, JODI, AND JOHN"

Becky Hilton, Jodi Melnick, and John Jasperse return to Dance Theatre Workshop for a reprise of their beloved collaboration from 2007. The aging of dancers is the dominant theme of their multi-layered work, drawn from their lives and presented with a nakedness that's at once endearing and challenging, smart and silly. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 27-30 at 7:30.)

ROBBINSCHILDS

"Sonya and Layla Go Camping" takes its inspiration from "Celine and Julie Go Boating," the surreal and self-referential Jacques Rivette film from 1974. Both works are concerned with friendship and collaboration, an almost built-in theme for the downtown duo of Sonya Robbins and Layla Childs, who are video

artists as well as choreographers. Repetition is their chosen method here. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. May 28-30 at 8.)

INFINITY DANCE THEATRE

Kitty Lunn has been dancing for some fifty years, the last twenty as a paraplegic in a wheelchair. Her company of dancers with and without disabilities performs "Body of Work," an evening of commissions from the choreographers Carla Vannucci, Peter Pucci, and Heidi Latsky, along with a premiere by Lunn and a revival of Robert Koval's "After All." (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. May 28-30 at 8 and May 31 at 3.)



Debbie Fleming Caffery's photograph "Angel Smoking, 1999," at Gitterman.

LIONEL POPKIN

There is indeed an elephant in "There Is an Elephant in This Dance," presented by Danspace Project. It's a furry elephant suit, which, worn in pieces or whole, seems by turns comical, creepy, and uncanny. The whole dance is like that: disquieting, the cliché pushed past the literal. Hands hide in pockets when they aren't in a mouth, usually someone else's. Popkin is joined by Carolyn Hall, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Peggy Piacenza, all distinctive presences. Robert Een performs his spare score live. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. May 28-30 at 8:30.)

THE TOM TOM CREW

This group of irrepressible Aussies, clad in low-slung jeans and T-shirts (or bare-chested), bring their high-energy mixture of acrobatics, wild percussion (a little bit like "Stomp"), and mugging to the New Victory. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. May 29 at 7, May 30 at 2 and 7, and May 31 at noon and 5. Through June 14.)

EIFMAN BALLET / "ONEGIN"

Boris Eifman, who began making his controversial ballets in Soviet Russia, choreographs works that hinge on extreme theatricality, acrobatic pas de deux, and spectacular effects: they either grip you by the throat or send you rushing for the aisles. He has updated Pushkin's "Eugene Onegin," setting it in post-Soviet Russia and ratcheting up the drama, with the aid of a score that intercuts Tchai-

kovsky with wailing rock guitar. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. May 29 at 8, May 30 at 2 and 8, and May 31 at 3.)

"FLY: FIVE FIRST LADIES OF DANCE"

The five women brought together for this landmark gathering (presented by 651 Arts) have earned their status as some of the most influential performers and choreographers of the past decades. Dianne McIntyre, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and Senegal's Germaine Acogny each perform a new solo. Bebe Miller revives her 1989 piece "Rain." And Carmen de Lavallade, still luminous at seventy-eight, incarnates "The Creation," a sermon-with-

tured. (South Oxford Space, 138 S. Oxford St., Fort Greene, Brooklyn. 718-398-4024. May 29-30 at 8.)

"WORKS & PROCESS" SERIES:

"GREEN ARIA"

A century ago, the decadent Russian composer Alexander Scriabin dreamed of a mega-opera that would combine music, dance, color, and scent. Now the composers Nico Muhly and Valgeir Sigurdsson (in collaboration with the perfumer Christophe Laudamiel) have taken a small step in that direction. In "Green Aria," a "scent opera" conceived and directed by Stewart Matthew, audience members will be immersed in an "arom-audio" world of sound, temperature, and sensation, with the help of a "scent microphone" attached to each seat. The Guggenheim Museum hosts the world premiere. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. May 31 at 7:30 and 9:30 and June 1 at 4:30, 7:30, and 9:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC:

"AN EVENING WITH BARBARA COOK"

The beloved musical-theatre and cabaret artist's Indian summer continues with a return engagement at Avery Fisher Hall, backed by the musicians of the Philharmonic, under the baton of Cook's music director, Lee Musiker. She'll delve into the repertoire of her current Feinstein's at the Regency show, including gems by Sondheim, Porter, Ray Charles, and Rodgers and Hammerstein. (212-875-5656. May 30 at 8.)

NEW YORK YOUTH SYMPHONY

The Staatskapelle Berlin's Mahler festival is done at Carnegie Hall, but another group will pick up the slack: Ryan McAdams's superb student orchestra, which already has several Mahler symphonies under its belt, offers the dulcet Symphony No. 4 in G Major (with the young Met and City Opera soprano Jennifer Zetlan) as well as Debussy's "Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune" and the world premiere of Trevor Gureckis's "Recurrent Dream." (212-247-7800. May 31 at 2.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA:

"COMPOSING A NATION"

In the young state of Israel, a cadre of superb classical musicians, refugees trained at Europe's finest conservatories, found themselves immersed in an exotic world of Middle Eastern sights, sounds, and traditions. The composers who took on the responsibility of creating an Israeli identity are the focus of Leon Botstein's latest concert, in which he conducts works by such patriarchal figures as Paul Ben-Haim, Mordecai Seter, and Josef Tal. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. May 31 at 3.)

LITTLE ORCHESTRA SOCIETY:

"VIVALDI'S VENICE"

In the first of two concerts, Dino Anagnost conducts his longtime group in a re-creation of the musical whirl of an eighteenth-century Venetian *carnavale*, a program featuring works by Vivaldi, Handel, and Bach; the flutist Carol Wincenc, the soprano Julia Kogan, and the harpsichordist Kenneth Cooper are special guests. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. June 2 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

THE MOVADO HOUR

The Baryshnikov Arts Center's stylish, laid-back (and popular) series of hour-long concerts continues with a program by the pianist Stephen Prutsman, who will offer Bach's English Suite in D Minor, BWV 811, before joining the violinist Anna Elashvili and the cellist Edward Arron for Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 in E Minor. A wine reception precedes the music. (450 W. 37th St. May 27 at 7. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-279-4200.)

AMERICAN STRING QUARTET:

"WHEN ART SPEAKS"

Three distinguished North American poets—Frank Bidart, Matthea Harvey, and J. Mae Barizo—share the stage at (Le) Poisson Rouge with the elegant and authoritative ensemble; the poets will read from their work, interspersed with music by Beethoven (the "Grosse Fuge"), Webern, Bartók (the

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS:

"PAUL'S CASE"

A performance of scenes from a new opera (based on the gritty Willa Cather story) by the noted young composer Gregory Spears is the main attraction in the innovative group's latest program. Music from "Sharon's Grave," a forthcoming opera by a proven theatre veteran, Richard Wargo, is also fea-

Third Quartet), and Ruth Crawford Seeger. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. May 27 at 7.)

CORNELIUS DUFALLO'S "DREAM STREETS"
Dufallo, a violinist in the invaluable downtown string quartet Ethel, is also a gifted composer. He performs music for violin and electronic sounds from his new album, "Dream Streets," at an unconventional venue, Rockwood Music Hall. (196 Allen St. 212-477-4155. May 27 at 8.)

LOCRIAN CHAMBER PLAYERS

This long-standing new-music collective concentrates solely on works that are less than a decade old, representing a spectrum of contemporary styles. Its next concert (with the New Hudson Saxophone Quartet as its guest) offers music by such composers as Roger Reynolds, Elias Tanenbaum, and Melissa Hui. (10th Floor Performance Space, Riverside Church, 91 Claremont Ave. May 28 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

"SONGS FROM THE UPROAR"

"Undiscovered Islands," a four-week series of new music at Dumbo's Galapagos Art Space (where art and alcohol mix freely), closes with the premiere of a multimedia work by the up-and-coming composer Missy Mazzoli and the filmmaker Stephen Taylor; it's based on the strange story of Isabelle Eberhardt, a Swiss woman who moved to North Africa in the late nineteenth century. Abigail Fischer sings the piece, backed by the Now Ensemble. (16 Main St., Brooklyn. www.undiscoveredislands.com. May 29 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC

May 29 at 8: An ensemble that includes the Met Orchestra clarinetist Anthony McGill delves into two utterly dissimilar works: the Wind Quintet in C Major, Op. 79, by the staunchly late-Romantic composer August Klughardt, and the pathbreaking Wind Quintet (1924) by the twelve-tone icon Arnold Schoenberg. ♦ May 30 at 8 and May 31 at 3: The violinist Mark Peskanov, the director of the floating chamber-music series, joins the cellist Nicholas Tzavaras (of the Shanghai Quartet) and the pianist Steven Beck in piano trios by Haydn, Mozart (in D Minor, K. 442), and Beethoven (the "Archduke"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

"WRITING JAZZ"

Gunther Schuller, the virtuoso composer-instrumentalist who has blended jazz and classical influences better than just about anyone, will give an authoritative lecture an hour before this tempting program offered by the Lark Chamber Artists, the Zephyros Winds, and the pianist Anthony de Mare, which features works by such composers as Copland, Antheil, Milhaud, Gershwin, Ellington, William Bolcom, and David Rakowski (the world premiere of "Stolen Moments"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. May 30 at 8:30.)

BANG ON A CAN MARATHON

Spring in New York isn't complete without this annual foray into the realms of post-minimalist, experimental, and world music, which this year features compositions by Michael Gordon, Meredith Monk, Kevin Volans, David Lang (an excerpt from the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Little Match Girl"), and others, performed by such groups as Ethel, Lionheart, Ars Nova Copenhagen, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars, along with the incomparable pi-pa player Wu Man. It runs for twelve hours (at least), and it's free. (Winter Garden, World Financial Center, 220 Vesey St. May 31 at noon. No tickets required.)

"FREE FOR ALL AT TOWN HALL":

ANNE-MARIE McDERMOTT

The price-is-right concert series, which presents only the finest classical artists, returns to the schedule with a concert by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's admired pianist, a forceful player who will offer a program that alternates solo sonatas by Haydn (including No. 20 in C Minor and No. 52 in E-Flat Major) with new music (the world premiere of Charles Wuorinen's Fourth Piano Sonata and the New York premiere of Clarice Assad's "When Art Showed Up"). (123 W. 43rd St. May 31 at 5. Free tickets, which are limited to two per customer, will be available at the box office beginning at noon.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS

The intrepid new-music ensemble gathers at its longtime home, Merkin Concert Hall, to perform premieres of works for instruments and electronic sounds by such composers as Judith Shatin ("Spring

Tides"), Richard Teitelbaum, and Lydia Ayers. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. June 1 at 8.)

GEORGE PERLE MEMORIAL CONCERT

Perle, the renowned composer and music theorist, died in January. A distinguished roster of musical friends—including the cellist Fred Sherry, the pianist Leon Fleisher, and the Daedalus Quartet—will pay tribute to him in a free concert that includes not only several works by Perle but also music by Chopin, Beethoven, and Berg. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. June 2 at 11 A.M. No tickets required.)

ENSEMBLE ACJW

The group's name may be clunky, but the young musicians who play in it are anything but, offering polished performances of new and repertory pieces on a regular basis. Their next concert, at Juilliard's Paul Hall, features music by Feldman ("Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety"), Debussy, Shostakovich (the Piano Quintet), and Mozart (the Serenade for Winds in C Minor, K. 388). (Juilliard School, Lincoln Center. June 2 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

MOVIES

OPENING

DEPARTURES

In this drama, directed by Yojiro Takita, an unemployed cellist finds work in a funeral home. In Japanese. Opening May 29. (In limited release.)

DRAG ME TO HELL

Sam Raimi directed this horror film, about a banker (Alison Lohman) who is cursed after evicting an old woman from her home. Co-starring Justin Long. Opening May 27. (In wide release.)

OWL AND THE SPARROW

A romantic drama, directed by Stephane Gauger, about an orphaned woman who runs away to Saigon and falls in love with a lonely zookeeper. In Vietnamese. Opening May 29. (Cinema Village.)

PONTYPOOL

Bruce McDonald directed this horror film, about a virus that is spread by a radio station's transmissions. Opening May 29. (In limited release.)

PRESSURE COOKER

A documentary, directed by Jennifer Grausman and Mark Becker, about the unusual methods of Wilma Stephenson, a high-school teacher. Opening May 27. (IFC Center.)

UP

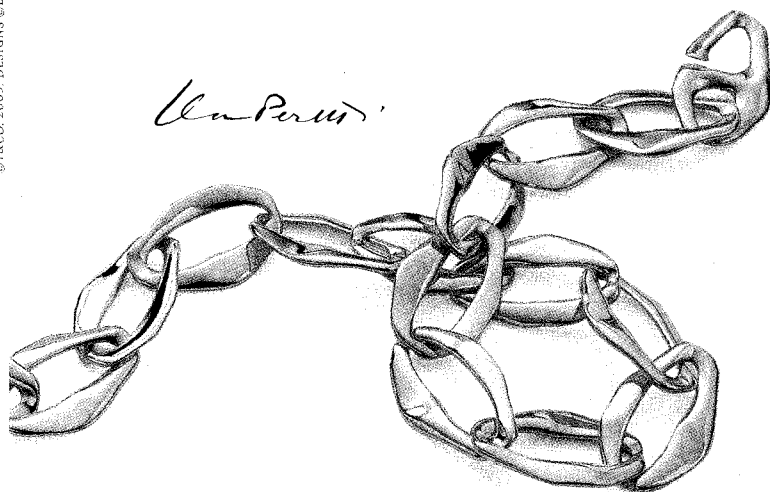
An animated comedy, directed by Pete Docter, about an elderly man who uses helium-filled balloons to fly his house to South America and discovers that a child has sneaked along with him. With the voices of Edward Asner, Christopher Plummer, and Jordan Nagai. Opening May 29. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

ALEXANDRIA . . . WHY?

Youssef Chahine's exuberant 1978 drama of life in his home city during the Second World War is centered on Yehia (Mohsen Mohiedine), a teen-age boy who, mirroring the director's own youth, attends a respected English-language high school, is crazy for Hollywood movies, produces and stars in elaborate stage productions (which foreshadow, in tone and ambition, those of "Rushmore"), and yearns to move to America to study film at the Pasadena Playhouse (which Chahine in fact attended). The young man's story yields a daring social and political cross-section of the multi-ethnic Alexandria of that era, which includes a Communist who is in love with a Jewish woman; two homosexual men; Muslim Brotherhood leaders; and ostensible patriots who are so eager to throw off British colonial rule that they eagerly await the German invasion and work as a fifth column for the Nazis. Chahine doesn't shrink from representing the plight of the city's Jews, whose search for a safe haven prompts his grave reflections on Zionism

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and a bitterly ironic ending. The city's teeming energy, in Chahine's view, is inevitably, darkly fostering the political clashes that marked Egypt and the Middle East in his adulthood. His historical memories—evoked through fondly recovered cultural artifacts and a clever use of newsreel footage—are brought to life with a powerful dramatic imagination. In Arabic and English.—*Richard Brody* (BAM; May 31.)

ANGELS & DEMONS

More drivel from Dan Brown's fictions, adapted by Ron Howard and the screenwriters Akiva Goldsman and David Koepp, and starring Tom Hanks as the Harvard "symbolist" Dr. Robert Langdon. There's the reliable old garbage of secret societies, insignias, codes, tombs, rats, rotting corpses, and uncanny inscriptions. There are fire and torment, unspeakable practices dwelled on at length. And there are puzzles and potted bits of art history, bristling with unexpected interest. It seems that great paintings and statues play a leading role in ancient webs of conspiracy. Da Vinci knew Vatican secrets; so did Raphael. (Brown doesn't bother with minor artists.) Essentially, it's a treasure hunt, with each work of art containing a clue that leads our hero to rush to the other side of Rome, where he discovers a cardinal who has just been murdered. With Ayelet Zurer as an Italian physicist who accompanies Langdon on the hunt. Shot largely on sets built in Los Angeles.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/25/09.) (In wide release.)

ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL

Anybody schooled in "This Is Spinal Tap" could be forgiven for assuming that there was no further amusement, let alone rarer emotions, to be mined from heavy metal. Somehow, though, Sacha Gervasi's documentary digs deep into a real-life case—the attempted resurrection of Anvil, which was founded in the early nineteen-seventies and banged heads with fame in the eighties—to emerge with a saga of devotion and perseverance that seems at once touching and absurd. Gervasi is especially fortunate in having the founding fathers of the group, Robb Reiner and Steve (Lips) Kudlow, now in creased middle age, to guide us through its many downs and very occasional ups. The action stretches from their native Canada to Transylvania, via Japan and Stonehenge (the last being an obvious must-see for any Druid-haired rocker). By the end, to our surprise, we mind very much whether the fortunes of Anvil are set to soar or doomed to lurch once more; if most of their music sounds like a fight in a lumber mill, who cares?—*Anthony Lane* (4/20/09) (In limited release.)

FIGHTING

As a picture about the sullen art of bare-knuckle boxing—scratch-and-claw combat without rules—it's a fake. The movie's language is chaste, and the fights, staged in back alleys, hidden rooms, and half-finished apartments, may look violent at first glance, but the actual blows and the pain of battle are hidden by tricky editing or just ignored. The hero, Shawn MacArthur (Channing Tatum), after being thrown down on cement and flung against display cases and whatever other furniture happens to be around, shows up the next day with no more than a few decorative bruises on his face. Still, it's a decent commercial entertainment. The director, Dito Montiel ("A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints"), is from New York, and he has a feel for the hostile atmosphere of the after-hours city—the plug-ugly types lounging outside some crooked convenience store; the furtive activity of fight-scene hustlers, brokers, and middlemen; the fey, knowing sarcasm of the professional gamblers. With Terrence Howard as a saddened, philosophical street operator named Harvey Boarden, a gent who barely survives in the urban muck, and Zulay Henao as the vulnerable young single mother the hero falls for.—*D.D.* (5/11/09) (In wide release.)

IL DIVO

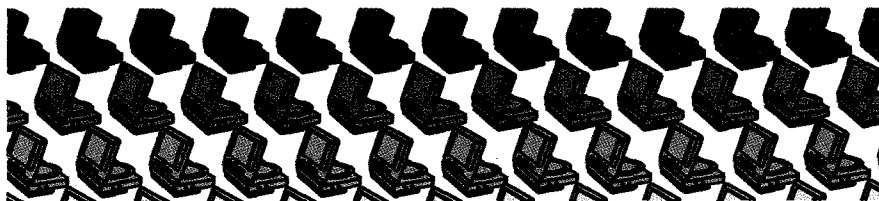
An elegant reunion for Paolo Sorrentino and Toni Servillo, the director and the star of "The Consequences of Love." In this case, the phlegmatic Servillo plays Giulio Andreotti—seven times Prime Minister of Italy, and an inextinguishable force at the heart of the country's politics. Try to imagine Nosferatu on the threshold of the Vatican and you come close to the bewitching figure that Servillo delivers here; he appears to glide rather than walk, to scorn minor sins in favor of larger conspiracy, and to taste each occurrence (even when

it threatens his own position) for its comic savor. By the end, you can't say you know him, but you can't get enough of him, either. The movie that spins around him feels, perhaps unavoidably, less refined; Sorrentino flourishes the secondary characters in style, but he allows the complexities of parliamentary scheming—and of Andreotti's reputed links to the Mafia—to splinter into fast, unmanageable fragments. If we can't hope to be enlightened, he seems to suggest, we might as well be dazed and confused. In Italian.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL

The end credits of the new Jim Jarmusch film read like paintings in a catalogue—"Nude," "Blonde," "Lone Man," and so on—an appropriate echo, since the

the great Steve Zahn gets a co-starring role, with Jennifer Aniston, in this slacker-like romantic comedy by the playwright Stephen Belber. Aniston plays Sue, a buttoned-down travelling saleswoman (she deals in decorative art), whose obsessions over charitable causes help spare her any emotional self-involvement. Zahn is Mike, a sweet, prospectless manager who works at his parents' modest Arizona motel. When Sue checks into the motel, it's love at first sight for Mike, and he begins pursuing her on a cross-country trip to win her love. The film is indifferently shot and at times has the feel of a theatre production, but there's nice supporting work from Woody Harrelson (as Sue's punk ex-boyfriend) and Margo Martindale (playing Mike's mom) to liven things up. There's also an af-



DVD NOTES TO BE THE KING

A pair of films in the boxed set "Alexander Korda's Private Lives" (Criterion Eclipse) prove that the producer-director Korda and the idiosyncratic star Charles Laughton were, in their prime, as formidable a filmmaking team as John Ford and John Wayne or Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro. In "The Private Life of Henry VIII" (1933), Laughton may well be the exemplary glutton—he's hilarious when he complains about the end of delicacy and refinement while scarfing down a meal with both hands—but he's also smart and charismatic in the King's dealings with the court, his military ambitions, and his verbal duels with the clever Anne of Cleves, his fourth wife (the delightfully arch Elsa Lanchester, who was Laughton's wife). Most surprising of all, he's touching in his affection for his fifth wife, Katherine Howard (Binnie Barnes), who discovers, alas, that she cannot live without the love of Thomas Culpeper (Robert Donat). Laughton does a magnificent job of conveying how potent a monarch can feel in his prime: when Howard tests Henry's virility and then cheats on him, his pathos is truly king-size.

The Korda-Laughton "Rembrandt" (1936) is a remarkable reverie on art and life. It succeeds because the script (by Carl Zuckmayer, from a story by June Head) makes Rembrandt as articulate verbally as he is visually, and Laughton shades the painter's words

with melancholy and an inchoate yearning. What unmooers him near the start is the death of his wife, Saskia; no offscreen character has ever got a greater send-off than the tribute Laughton's Rembrandt pays to her in public when, unknown to him, back home she is dying. As Rembrandt's practical housekeeper and mistress, Gertrude Lawrence displays the unsentimental emotional attack that fuelled her theatrical legend; Lanchester is spunky as his common-law wife, Hendrickje Stoffels. Whether reciting the story of King Saul or munching on a herring, Laughton imbues his Rembrandt with a Biblical vitality, and Korda captures every resonating feeling, gesture, and syllable.

Korda's "The Private Life of Don Juan" (1934) features Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., in both a spoof of Don Juanism and a satire of its middle-aged star—an action hero past his prime playing a different kind of action hero past his prime. And "The Rise of Catherine the Great" (1934), produced by Korda and directed by Paul Czinner, features Fairbanks, Jr., near his peak, in a Byronic interpretation of Grand Duke Peter as a man hopelessly conflicted in his feelings toward Elisabeth Bergner's vivacious Catherine. But Laughton's movies, with their meatiness, anchor this set and elevate it to rare artistic heights.

—*Michael Sragow*

movie itself is sprinkled with works of art, most of them studied on the walls of Spanish galleries by the loner at its center. As played by Isaach De Bankolé, he has no name but, by way of compensation, does have a fine selection of suits, in which he travels to Madrid, Seville, and elsewhere, hooking up with mysterious contacts, exchanging codes and diamonds, and gradually inching toward his ultimate (and surprisingly violent) task. The cityscapes, in particular, are shot with acuity and wit by the cinematographer Christopher Doyle, who pushes them to the brink of abstraction, and the supporting cast, which includes Gael García Bernal, Bill Murray, and Tilda Swinton, could hardly be hipper, or more tuned in to the styles of movies past. The only question is: when a film about a cool fellow, on a cool mission, looks this cool, what is to prevent it from freezing into a series of attitudes? Jarmusch lacks for nothing in his deadpan pastiche of spy thrillers, but some viewers may experience a residual, vulgar longing for the real thing. And you can't blame them.—*A.L.* (5/4/09) (In limited release.)

MANAGEMENT

After small, precise turns in two other films this year ("The Great Buck Howard," "Sunshine Cleaning"),

fecting low-key tempo to Belber's dialogue that allows Aniston to bring some honest, focussed attention to her role. But, above all, it's Zahn's puppy-dog charm that keeps the film scampering about amiably.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

MEET MARLON BRANDO

In New York to promote the film "Morituri," in 1965, the actor allowed the documentary filmmakers Albert and David Maysles to capture his interactions with junketeering journalists, and the results are delicious. Proving Norman Mailer's contention that Brando seemed to have better things of his own to say than anything a script could offer, the filmmakers give Brando his greatest role, himself. He challenges his interviewers with raw, personal reflections and teasing insinuations. His blend of disarming sincerity and ironic disdain for the process, coupled with his endless need to wrangle with men and to charm women, yields a wealth of expressions, facial and verbal, that impress themselves on the memory like the loftiest of performances. There are many quotable lines and moments, as when a former Miss U.S.A. asks Brando for a behind-the-scenes view of the film and he asks, "How far behind the scenes?"

STEVE POWERS

Speaking, in French, to a French television journalist interviewing him on Fifth Avenue, Brando calls attention to a passerby, a pretty young black woman, whom he brings on-camera to discuss American racial politics. When asked about his versatility as an actor, he alludes to the interview itself, saying, "I think the handling of anything we do is a reflection of ourselves," and he delivers a sublimely Hemingwayesque definition of his art: "One is able to adjust oneself to a situation."—R.B. (Anthology Film Archives; May 27.)

THE POLYMATH; OR, THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF SAMUEL R. DELANY, GENTLEMAN

A brisk documentary, by Fred Barney Taylor, featuring the prolific science-fiction author and literary critic. Delany's novels, dim views of the future couched in an almost Shakespearean language, can be a dense and time-draining experience, so it comes as a nice surprise that Delany himself is a straightforward, no-holds-barred speaker. He recalls in vivid detail the black experience of the late forties and fifties in New York City and the particulars of his childhood in Harlem, where he grew up above his father's funeral parlor. Later, when he moved to the Lower East Side, he lived a gloriously promiscuous gay life while managing to write five novels by the time he was twenty-two. With his big white beard and bearish girth, Delany makes a warm impression, and Taylor's simple, understated direction, which gently prods Delany's recollections, makes the film a lively and thoughtful look at a deeply lived-in life.—B.D. (UnionDocs; May 31.)

ROSETTA

The camera crowds in behind Rosetta (Émilie Dequenne), a girl of maybe seventeen or eighteen, as she goes about her furious, molelike economic activity, selling mended clothes, fishing in a miserable swamp, running back and forth between the trailer camp in which she lives and the waffle stands of her rain-soaked Belgian city. This dour but stirring masterpiece of moral inquiry, from 1999, was written and directed by the Belgians Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, who appear, at first, to be Marxists without a program. Their appalling, unsmiling heroine, they seem to say, is the kind of pleasureless, other-annihilating person produced by the capitalist system. Yet they make Rosetta a person, not an economic integer, and their realization of her life is an outstanding imaginative feat. We await, with excited curiosity, those stirrings of Rosetta's consciousness which might suggest that she has emerged from the mud of her life for a breath of fresh air. In French.—D.D. (Film Society of Lincoln Center; May 27.)

THE SEASONS

Filmed in 1972 in a style rooted in the nineteen-twenties, the Armenian director Artavazd Pelechian's short documentary reveals practices that are likely unchanged since the Middle Ages. Beginning with the epic struggle of man versus sheep, fought in raging waters that batter and upend all contenders, Pelechian exalts, with a rugged lyricism, the repetitive travails of herders and farmers, as well as the sublime, destructive force of their natural environment. After mowing fields with rhythmic, synchronized scythe strokes, farmers drag their bales of hay down steep hillsides, sliding and stumbling just ahead of their bundles; but, soon, what looks like a game turns terrifying, as the bundles they flee from—and remain tethered to—grow as big as houses. In the age-old spectacle of subsistence, the intrusion of cars and their blaring headlights into a nocturnal roundup of flocks has the agonistic energy of a war scene, a moment in the clash of tradition and modernity. A rustic wedding, filmed impressionistically, is jolted by a shock cut that shows the proud, serene groom to be one of the roiled shepherders risking life and limb in the first scene's frightful currents. The remarkable result is ecstatic cinema with a solid material substrate.—R.B. (Anthology Film Archives; May 28.)

SIN NOMBRE

This modest epic of immigration is heightened by the brilliant filmmaking of the director Cary Joji Fukunaga (it's his first feature film). The drama—featuring interwoven stories about Honduran teen-agers trying to emigrate to the U.S. by any means necessary (and ultimately facing off with Mexican gangs who rob and kill illegal immigrants on their way

north)—is so vividly constructed that it achieves an almost thriller-like urgency. The young, unknown actors in the cast (including Paulina Gaitan and Edgar Flores) are a gifted wild bunch, and the performances are rooted in a naturalistic display of emotions that never feels forced. The film is sometimes dark and brutal, but it has a measure of grace and classical composition (the wide-screen images are remarkable) that carries the story along to a moving conclusion. In Spanish.—B.D. (In limited release.)

THE SOLOIST

A star reporter for the Los Angeles Times, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), befriends a classically trained musician, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who suffers from schizophrenia and lives on the Los Angeles streets. Downey approaches him with a mixture of professional curiosity and practiced caution. In return, Foxx doesn't look at him much. Turning away, he talks rapidly and lightly, praising Beethoven, always Beethoven, complete with opus numbers. He's not dangerous, but he's not sane, either, and the filmmakers—the screenwriter Susannah Grant (adapting Lopez's book) and the director Joe Wright—don't pretend that friendship can cure madness or that great music can heal wounds that have been open for years. Wright flies over L.A.'s tangled freeways like the angels hovering over Berlin in "Wings of Desire," and he turns Nathaniel's attendance at rehearsals of the Los Angeles Philharmonic into a bliss-out. But then he comes back to earth. Outside a shelter, the director assembles what seems like every lost and wrecked person in the city and halts the story to let them tell their tales. They make their own kind of music. Most of the rest is from Beethoven's Third and Ninth Symphonies. It's hard to see how music and a sympathetic reporter can redeem a messy American city, but this movie makes a plausible case for so fervent a dream.—D.D. (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

STAR TREK

A new beginning, of sorts, for a franchise whose vision of the future seemed lost in the past. The director, J. J. Abrams, warps back to the early days not

only of Kirk (Chris Pine) and Mr. Spock (Zachary Quinto) but of the U.S.S. Enterprise herself. Kirk overcomes his rebellious streak—signalled very clearly, for the hard of understanding—to take command of the ship as she flames into combat against the spidery craft of Captain Nero (Eric Bana), who has already jump-started the movie by wiping out Kirk's dad. There is no shortage of time-leaps here, including a jumbled subplot about what might have happened, which involves a longish cameo from a cadaverous Leonard Nimoy. (It's unclear whether non-devout viewers will relish his presence, given that Quinto does such a serene and thoughtful job.) The action scarcely halts for breath, let alone for common sense, and the scene of a ship-to-planet free fall already ranks among the treasures of the headlong; what the movie gains in ardor and cockiness, however, it loses in charm, and the result is much easier to gawk at than to love. With Bruce Greenwood, the nimble-witted Simon Pegg (in the role of Scotty), and a graying Winona Ryder as Spock's mother—how old does that make you feel?—A.L. (5/18/09) (In wide release.)

SUMMER HOURS

A woman in her seventies (Edith Scob), the niece and possibly the lover of a deceased French painter, dies in her home outside Paris, and her three adult children, who grew up there, have to decide what to do with the house, the Art Nouveau furniture, and the paintings by Corot and other artists which they have always lived with. Two of the children, riding the surf of global capitalism, have made lives elsewhere. Watching Olivier Assayas's new film, we realize pretty quickly that the house is France itself—cultivated, beautiful, but powerless in the global era. But what will happen if the house is sold, the collection given to the Musée d'Orsay, the memories dissipated? Is it a tragedy? In the end, Assayas, shooting the film with relaxed, flowing camera movements, gives his love not to objects but to the disorderly life out of which art is made. With Charles Berling, Jérémie Renier, and Juliette Binoche, as the three children. In French.—D.D. (5/25/09) (In limited release.)

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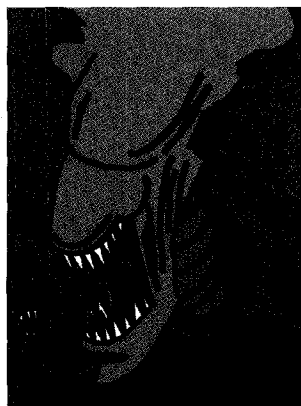
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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK HAPPY LANDINGS

James Cameron's "Aliens," which screens at BAM on May 27, was released in 1986, seven years after Ridley Scott's "Alien." It starts with Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) emerging like Sleeping Beauty from more than half a century



of interplanetary slumber, which she doubtless needed after her prior ordeal. The planet where it all happened, she learns, has since been colonized by humans, who have broken off contact with Earth—but note the time line: they did so only after she awoke. Is that a mere plot contrivance, or could it be that the monsters have been waiting for Ripley, to summon her to the fray? She certainly seems more determined and queenly this time around, with a foe to match, plus an android, played by Lance Henriksen, and the result is a formidable acceleration of all the fears that lurked in the first film: the frigidity of Scott's detached and spooky manner is replaced by the relentlessness of a racing heart. Action thrillers assail but rarely test us; this is the tautest, most provoking, and altogether most draining example ever made.

—Anthony Lane

TYSON

After seeing this fascinating James Toback documentary about Mike Tyson, one can never again think of the fighter as a simpleminded thug. He's a very complex-minded thug indeed, full of contradictions, which he articulates with considerable detail and feeling. The man we see is sad and vulnerable and ferocious all at once—frightened as a virtually parentless boy in Brooklyn who was robbed by neighborhood kids, then remorseless as a baby gangster robbing drug dealers. In detention in upstate New York, he was steered into boxing and wound up in the hands of the great trainer Cus D'Amato, who took him in, fathered him, and got him to concentrate his strength and rage into a relentless attack in which speed—a hail of punches—drives through his opponents' defenses. The rest is bravado, boasting, good and bad times with many women and hangers-on, enormous earnings (most of them blown), and wrenching self-criticism and self-abnegation. Toback doesn't press Tyson on the rape conviction that sent him to prison for three years. (Tyson claims he is innocent.) He lets Tyson speak at great length, and we are free to judge the self-mythologizing, which, however overblown, cannot blur the genuinely tragic story of an ignorant street kid's precipitous rise and disastrous fall.—D.D. (5/11/09) (In limited release.)

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

This noisy, undistinguished prequel to the "X-Men" series is mainly a fight film. The two warring mutant brothers, Liev Schreiber, a morose sadist with fangs, and Hugh Jackman, unhappy but ripped, fly at each other again and again, grappling, punching, slashing. Much of the combat is just a whirl of movement photographed up close. As the "X-Men" series has progressed, the startling and delicate poetic extravagances of the first film have given way to flesh-pounding brutishness; the men might be two angry Humvees at war. The story, devised by David Benioff and Skip Woods, is largely meaningless, and the emotions in the movie are no more than functional—they set up the next fight. With Danny Huston as the devious Colonel Stryker, who, claiming he can make Wolverine indestructible, dips him in a glass laboratory bathtub and injects a substance called adamantium into his veins. Naked, a buff Frankenstein's monster, Wolverine escapes, and Stryker tries to hunt him down. Various other mutants make brief appearances, to little effect. Directed by Gavin Hood.—D.D. (5/11/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

MONSTERS VS. ALIENS: In wide release. **NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN:** In wide release. **STATE OF PLAY:** In wide release. **VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Festival dei Popoli." May 27 at 7: "Meet Marlon Brando" (†), introduced by the co-director Albert Maysles. ♦ May 27 at 9: "Dead Birds" (1963, Robert Gardner). ♦ May 28 at 7: "The Seasons" (†) and "Odessa" (2006, Leonardo Di Costanzo and Bruno Oliviero; in Italian and French), introduced by Di Costanzo and Oliviero. ♦ May 28 at 9: "Uku Ukai" (2006, Audrius Stonys; in Lithuanian) and "Napoli Piazza Municipio" (2008, Oliviero; in Italian and French), introduced by Oliviero. ♦ May 29 at 7: "10 Minutes Older" (1978, Herz Frank) and "For One More Hour with You" (2002, Alina Marazzi; in Italian), introduced by Marazzi. ♦ May 29 at 9: "We Want Roses Too" (2007, Marazzi), introduced by the director. ♦ May 30 at 4:30: "Mur Murs" (1980, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ May 30 at 6:30: "Paradise" (1995, Sergei Dvortsevoy; in Russian) and "Nobody's Business" (1996, Alan Berliner). ♦ May 31 at 6:30: "Holunderblüte" (2007, Volker Koepp; in German). ♦ May 31 at 8:30: "Psychiatry in Russia" (1955, Albert Maysles) and "With Love from Truman" (1966, Maysles). ♦ In première. May 29 and June 1-4 at 7

and 9 and May 30-31 at 3, 5, 7, and 9: "Munyuran-gabo" (2007, Lee Isaac Chung; in Kinyarwanda).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Special screenings. May 27 at 6:30 and 9:30: "Aliens" (1986, James Cameron). ♦ May 28 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Dare Not Walk Alone" (2006, Jeremy Dean). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ The films of Youssef Chahine. All films are in Arabic. May 29 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Cairo Station" (1958). ♦ May 30 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Land" (1969). ♦ May 31 at 3, 6, and 9: "Alexandria... Why?" (†). ♦ "The Believer Presents JLG in USA." June 1 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "One P.M." (1972, Jean-Luc Godard and D. A. Pennebaker).

CHINA INSTITUTE

125 E. 65th St. (212-744-8181)—"Sinomathèque." May 29 at 6:30: "Oxhide" (2004, Liu Jiayin; in Mandarin).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. May 27-28 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Dr. Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ May 29-31 and June 2 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10 and June 1 at 1, 2:50, and 4:40: "Rashomon" (1950, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese). ♦ The films of Tod Browning. June 1 at 6:30 and 9:10: "Mark of the Vampire" (1935). ♦ June 1 at 7:45 and 10:25: "West of Zanzibar" (1928).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. All films are in French. May 27 at 1:30 and 8:30: "Rosetta" (†). ♦ May 27 and May 30 at 3:30 and June 2 at 8:30: "Falsch" (1987) and "Regard Jonathan/Jean Louvet, Son Oeuvre" (1983). ♦ May 27 at 6:15, May 28 at 4, and May 30 at 8:30: "L'Enfant" (2005) and "Il Court... Il Court le Monde" (1987). ♦ May 28 at 2 and May 30 at 1:30: "Lorsque le Bateau de Léon M. Descendit la Meuse pour la Première Fois" (1979) and "Pour Que la Guerre S'achève, les Murs Devaient S'écrouler" (1980). ♦ May 29 at 2 and May 31 at 1:30: "R... Ne Répond Plus" (1981) and "Leçons d'une Université Volante" (1982). ♦ May 29 at 4:30, May 31 at 4, and June 1 at 3: "Je Pense à Vous" (1992). ♦ May 29 at 6:40, May 31 at 6, and June 2 at 2:15 and 6:30: "La Promesse" (1996). ♦ May 29 at 8:30: A conversation with the Dardenne brothers. ♦ May 30 at 6:15, May 31 at 8, and June 2 at 4:15: "The Son" (2002).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Michel Piccoli. June 2 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." May 29-30: "The Lost Boys Revived" (1987, Joel Schumacher). ♦ "The Old Wave: Favorites from the French Masters." May 29-31 at 11 A.M.: "Beauty and the Beast" (1946, Jean Cocteau; in French). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. June 2 at 8: "Tibet in Song" (2009, Ngawang Choephel; in Tibetan and Mandarin).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Old West: Myth, Character, and Reinvention." May 27-29 at 1:30: "Lonesome Cowboys" (1967-68, Andy Warhol). ♦ The films of Julien Duvivier. May 28 at 8: "Holiday for Henrietta" (1952; in French). ♦ "Cruel and Unusual Comedy: Social Commentary in the American Slapstick Film," a silent-film series. May 27 at 7: "Gratuitous Violence: No Turn Unstoned," including "Their First Execution" (1913, Mack Sennett). ♦ May 29 at 4: "Animals and Children: No Harm Done," including "The Knockout" (1923, Len Powers). ♦ June 1 at 4: "The Machine Age: Mack Sennett vs. Henry Ford," including "Get Out and Get Under" (1920, Hal Roach). ♦ Special screening. June 1 at 8: "Laila's Birthday" (2008, Rashid Masharawi; in Arabic).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

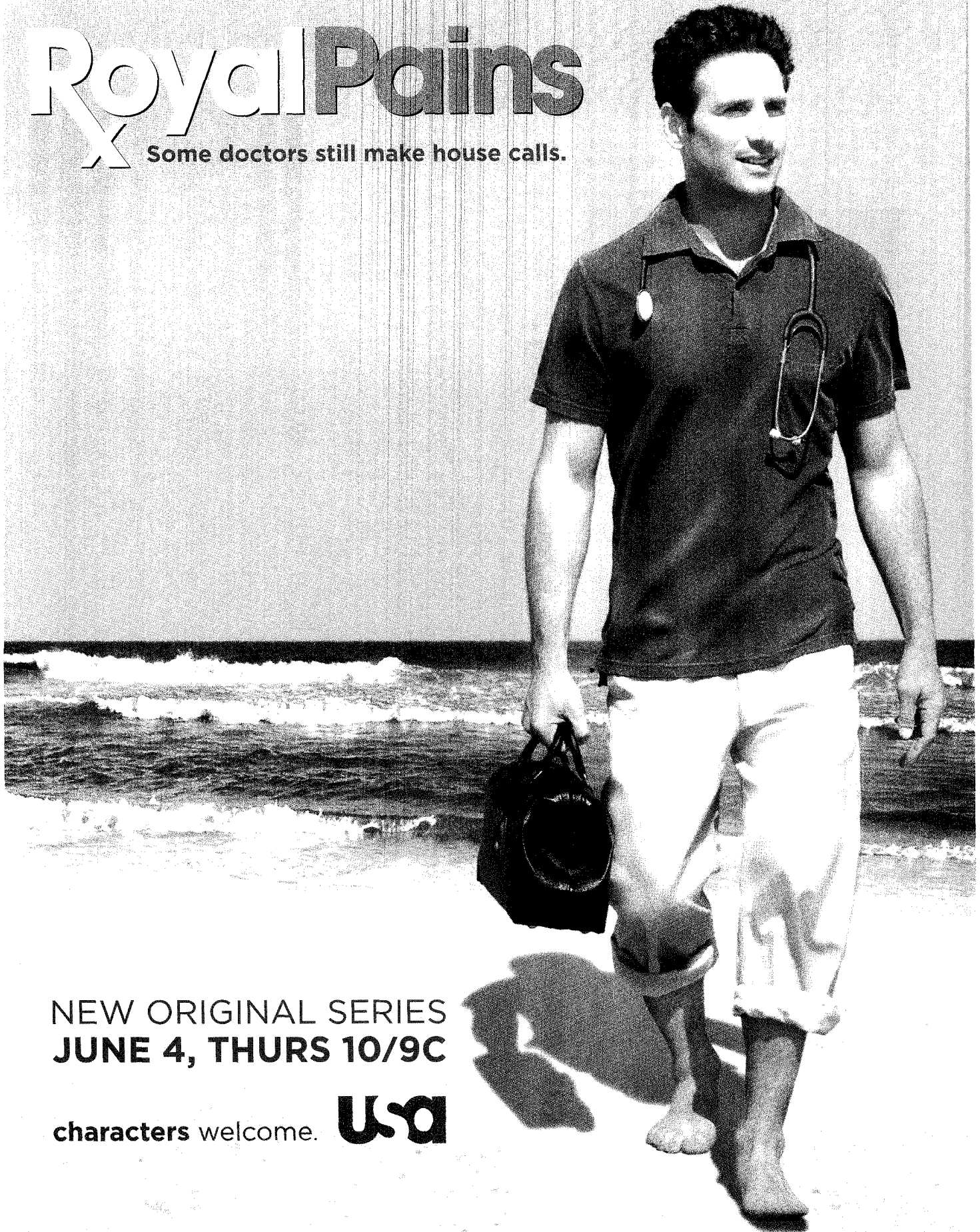
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 29 at 9:30: "Jules and Jim" (1962, François Truffaut; in French).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." May 29-30: "The Breakfast Club" (1985, John Hughes).

Royal Pains

X Some doctors still make house calls.



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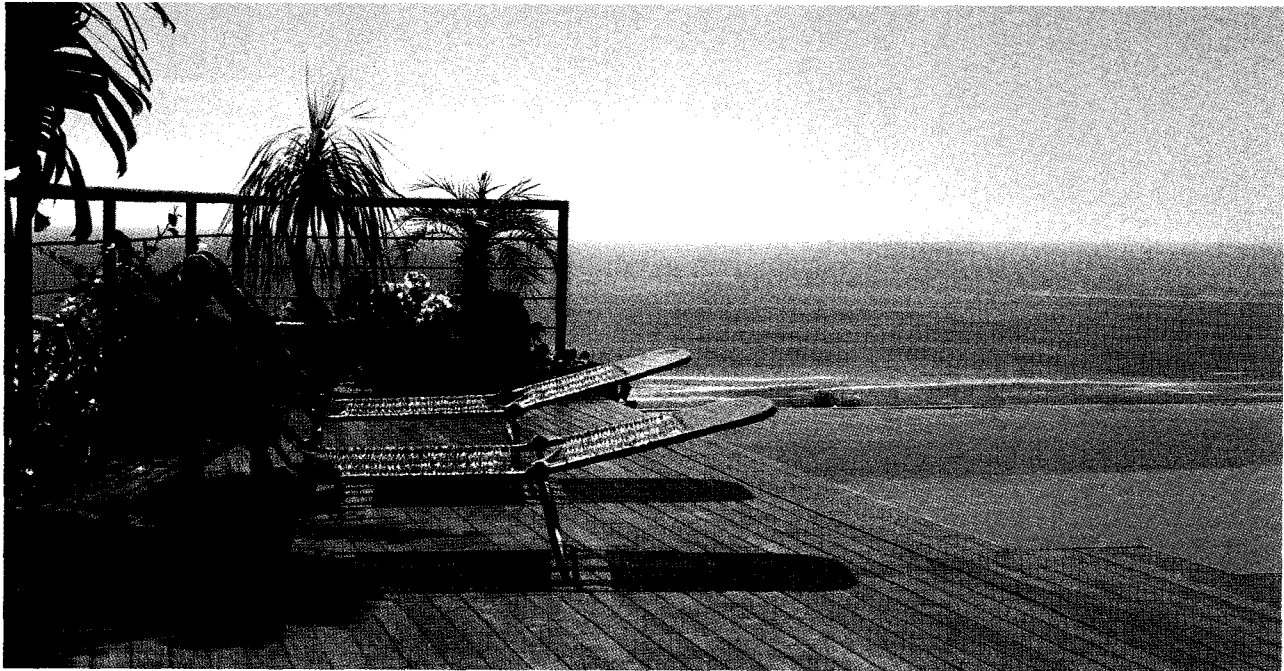
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Highly personalized health care may seem like a fantasy, but for those who can afford it, it's within reach, thanks to the advent of concierge medicine. Initially conceived in 1996, and still a relatively small movement—there are an estimated 5,000 concierge practitioners nationwide—concierge medicine is slowly winning over patients and physicians looking for alternatives to standard managed-care options.

Patients contract directly with a concierge doctor to receive optimal health care, more face time, and 24/7 access while physicians limit the number of their patients to offer more personalized attention. Ultimately, concierge medicine puts the focus back on the doctor-patient relationship.

A CHARACTER STUDY

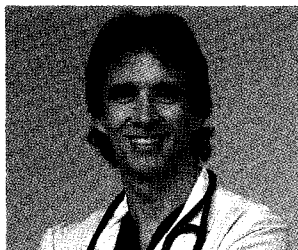
In USA Network's new hour-long series, "Royal Pains," the world of concierge doctors and the individuals they care for moves into full view. The backdrop: the Hamptons, the beachside enclave on the east end of Long Island, New York—home to both wealthy weekenders and year-round locals.

The main character of "Royal Pains," Dr. Hank Lawson (Mark Feuerstein), comes to concierge medicine more by circumstance than choice. Following an ethical but inopportune decision in the ER, Hank is fired from his promising job at a prominent New York City hospital. The young, talented doctor's life unravels. His brother Evan (Paulo Costanzo) eventually convinces the good doctor that a weekend in the Hamptons may be the cure for what ails him.

Just as circumstance played a role in the undoing of his career, the pendulum swings back in his favor as a chance incident permanently alters his life's course. After the brothers attend an estate party hosted by the wealthy Boris (Campbell Scott), Hank makes a lifesaving diagnosis when a guest requires urgent medical attention. Word spreads and, overnight, he becomes the town's concierge doctor.

Hank's career rebounds. He not only serves the Hamptons' social set, but locals, too. Aided by the ambitious beauty Divya (Reshma Shetty), Hank acclimates to his new surroundings. The transition is further eased after the local hospital administrator Jill (Jill Flint) opens a free clinic, lending Hank another outlet for his real calling: giving compassionate care to those in need.

THE PRACTITIONERS' VIEWPOINT



TUCSON PIONEER STEVEN D. KNOPE, M.D.

Dr. Steven D. Knope, a board-certified internist, sports medicine expert, four-time Ironman triathlete, and author of the pioneering book "Concierge Medicine: A New System to Get the Best Healthcare" (Greenwood/Praeger, 2008), sees concierge medicine as a return to the good old days, when people paid for office visits and "didn't have a third-party payer or Medicare imposing itself between the doctor and his relationships."

Since starting his concierge practice in Tucson, Arizona, eight years ago, this early adopter has built it up from four patients to 150. "A lot of people say it's elitist, but I spent a good decade of my life as chief of medicine fighting the good fight," says Dr. Knope.

In addition, he takes care of about 100 indigent patients and does work for former servicemen, gratis. "I have a very hybrid practice," he explains. "The way I view it, the folks in the concierge program subsidize great care for patients who couldn't otherwise afford it."

Dr. Knope's concierge patients pay a one-time annual retainer fee (\$6,000 for individuals; \$10,000 for couples) that includes everything from "true health care optimization to ICU care for medical catastrophes" to house calls, 24/7 access, same-day appointments, and hospital admittance by the physician. They also receive a two-hour physical, nutritional analysis with an on-staff dietician, and fitness analysis with a personal trainer in his in-office gym.

Happily, no day is ever the same at his office. "I find this to be a very rewarding way to practice, building relationships with my patients."



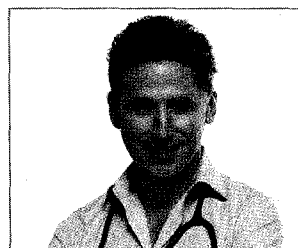
LOS ANGELES' LEADING LIGHT RAPHAEL DARVISH, M.D., M.B.A.

"This practice was started to get back to that old-fashioned patient-doctor relationship," says Dr. Raphael Darvish, a fourth-generation physician and medical director of Concierge Medicine/LA in the Brentwood area of Los Angeles. Growing up, he would hear his grandfather, father, and uncle, all doctors, discuss the lack of time they had for their patients—and how much better it had once been prior to managed care. "When I finished my training, I felt that there was a niche available on the Westside of L.A.," says Dr. Darvish. Concierge Medicine/LA has three physicians, including his father, Dr. Maurice Darvish, and about 1,000 patients. Some

individuals just purchase the annual presidential physical, which mirrors the comprehensive examination that the U.S. President receives, tweaked to their needs, while others opt for an annual membership, paying a flat fee ranging from \$1,750 to \$10,000, depending on age, which includes the presidential exam.

Dr. Darvish says that not all of his patients are wealthy—some are health-conscious, while others don't want the headache of H.M.O.s. "With the membership, they get full-on, 24/7 access to their physician: my cell phone number, no waiting, same-day appointments. We have the best of the best referral network if they need to see a specialist, and they get multi-physician meetings," he explains.

"In my eyes, concierge medicine is not that innovative," says Dr. Darvish. "It's doing something at a slow pace and just making sure that everything is perfect."



HAMPTONS HERO HANK LAWSON, M.D.

Although fictional, Hank offers insight into the new world of concierge care. Whether he's racing to save the life of an urban teenager or the son of a well-to-do Hamptonite, he always puts the needs of his patients above all else.

Unmotivated by money, impervious to power or prestige, the lead character in USA Network's "Royal Pains" is a confident, quick-witted man in his mid-thirties who cares deeply and passionately about his chosen profession. Even when faced with deep-pocketed patients who offer him cash—or bars of gold—

Hank strives to take the moral high road. And he succeeds.

The realization that he was able to help so many patients in short order following his Hamptons arrival—and unwavering persuasion by his brother—convinces Hank that he might be needed in the East End. And so begins the story of the Hamptons' latest medical practice: HankMed.

But for Hank, making the switch from a traditional practice to a concierge doctor entails more than just switching Zip Codes. He must also adjust to the patients at hand. And once he meets the local hospital administrator, Jill, who is equally as principled, Hank realizes that he may have a chance to serve not only the rich, but patients of varying social strata in Long Island's most vibrant beachside community.

Royal Pains

NEW ORIGINAL SERIES
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NEW SEASON. NEW
JUNE 4, THURSDAY

UNIONDOCS

322 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-395-7902)—“Documentary Bodega.” May 31 at 7: “The Polymath; or, The Life and Opinions of Samuel R. Delany, Gentleman” (†), followed by a discussion with Delany and the director, Fred Barney Taylor.

READINGS AND TALKS

“ITALIAN POETRY NOW”

On May 26 at 6, the Italian poets Maria Atranasio, Giovanna Frene, Marco Giovenale, and Milli Graffi and the Italian-American poet Jennifer Scappettone discuss their work with the critic and translator Carla Billitteri at the Italian Cultural Institute (686 Park Ave., between 68th and 69th Sts.). The following night, at 8, they head downtown to the Poetry Project (10th St. at Second Ave.) for a bilingual reading. (For more information, visit www.poetshouse.org.)

GEORGE S. MCGOVERN

The former senator and Presidential candidate discusses “Abraham Lincoln,” his biography of the sixteenth President. (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 66th St. No tickets necessary. May 27 at 5.)

BOOKCOURT

The Brooklyn-based writer Gabriel Cohen reads from his new novel, “Neptune Avenue.” (163 Court St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. May 27 at 7.)

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE

The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano reads from and talks about his new book (a sort of history of the world), “Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone,” with Lawrence Weschler, the director of the New York Institute for the Humanities. (2 W. 64th St. No tickets necessary. May 27 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

“YOU’RE NOT ALONE”

Book Expo America, the publishing industry’s largest trade show in the country, comes to New York City this week. For four days, authors, editors, agents, publishers, and bookstore owners will mingle at the Javits Center. Drumming up business at a book fair is a daunting prospect in good times and a downright dour one in today’s economy, but a few people are doing something to lift spirits. The literary and online concerns *The Rumpus*, *McSweeney’s*, and *Smithmag* have put together the program “You’re Not Alone,” at the Highline Ballroom. Hosted by *The Rumpus*’s editor, Stephen Elliott, it includes comedy from Todd Barry and Eugene Mirman; music by Nada Surf’s leading man, Matthew Caws, and the Dresden Dolls’ Amanda Palmer; and readings by Amy Tan, Anthony Swofford, the Six-Word Memoirists, and the authors Jessica Anthony and James Hannaham. (431 W. 16th St. 212-414-5994. May 30 at 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby’s starts off the week’s auctions of Latin American art with a two-day sale (May 27-28) focussed on modern works, with a sprinkling of nineteenth-century and more contemporary pieces. The star of the first evening is a nearly square Surrealist composition by Leonora Carrington entitled “Chiki, Ton Pays,” in which the artist and her husband (the photographer Chiki Weisz) float above a mountainous terrain, enveloped by a billowing red robe and crowned with trees. The sale also includes a portrait of a child by Diego Rivera, and, of course, several paintings and sculptures by Botero. Among the few colonial works is a Coronation of the Virgin

by an anonymous eighteenth-century Mexican artist. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Christie’s goes mano a mano with its uptown rival in a Latin American sale (May 28-29) headlined by a Diego Rivera self-portrait from 1941, in which the great Mexican painter holds a letter bearing the name of his patron (a nod to conventions of nineteenth-century portraiture); the buyer will also receive fourteen letters between Rivera, his on-again, off-again consort Frida Kahlo, and the patron. Another highlight of the auction is a recently discovered work by the Cuban modernist Mario Carreño, painted with a quick-drying lacquer known as Duco, which allows for multiple layers of color. The day sale on May 29 features a group of colonial works, including two depictions of the Archangel Michael (or San Miguel); the following week, attention at the house will turn to twentieth-century decorative art and design (June 2), including several pieces that were originally part of the Chicago Stock Exchange Building, designed in 1893 by Sullivan and Adler (and, alas, demolished in 1972). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Phillips, the downtown upstart, holds an auction of modern and contemporary prints and multiples on June 2; among the more intriguing lots are a pair of aquatints—“Ballerina (Stretching Right)” and “Ballerina (Stretching Left)” —by the artist Kiki Smith, in which the dancers’ gauzy, old-fashioned tutus are made from a collage of tissue paper and glitter. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

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Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES

OUT IN GERMANY

June 4-7

With the 1970 documentary “It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, but the Society in Which He Lives,” the director Rosa von Praunheim spearheaded the West German gay-rights movement. His 1992 film “I Am My Own Woman” features Charlotte von Mahlsdorf herself, the subject of Doug Wright’s “I Am My Own Wife.” Von Praunheim will be on hand for Anthology Film Archives’ retrospective of his work. (212-505-5181.)

NIGHT LIFE QUIET TIME

June 9

Peter Holsapple and Chris Stamey, the leaders of the jangle-pop group the dBs, have recorded a new album, “Here and Now,” their first together in nearly two decades. The two make a rare live appearance at City Winery. (www.citywinery.com.)

THE THEATRE EASE ON DOWN

June 12-July 5

The Encores! Summer Stars series presents the 1974 musical “The Wiz.” Ashanti stars as Dorothy, along with LaChanze

(as Glinda) and Orlando Jones (as the Wiz). Thomas Kail directs, at City Center. (212-581-1212.)

ART DRESS CODE

June 26-Sept. 20

Citing sources as diverse as the theories of Roland Barthes, the paintings of Gainsborough, and Verdi’s opera “Un Ballo in Maschera,” the British-based Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare creates films and sculptural tableaux of figures in costumes made from the brightly patterned fabrics produced in Europe for the African market. The Brooklyn Museum’s mid-

career survey will include a site-specific project in several period rooms. (718-638-5000.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC LESSONS IN VIRGIL

June 27

Virgil Thomson (1896-1989) was a brilliant music critic, a charming composer of songs, and a Machiavellian figure in the New York music business. Yale’s Norfolk Chamber Music Festival examines his complex legacy in a concert by the gifted soprano Susan Narucki. (203-432-1966.)

Yinka Shonibare, at the Brooklyn Museum.

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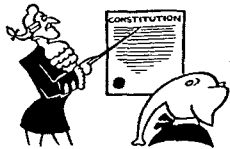
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT TWO SPEECHES



It's tempting to see last week's speech-making duel between Barack Obama and Dick Cheney as a mismatch, with the eloquence of the admired incumbent set against the snarl of the discredited predecessor. Certainly, there was no contest in terms of political stagecraft. Obama appeared in the hushed rotunda of the National Archives, in front of the documents that embody the highest aspirations of American government, while Cheney found a secure location at a right-wing think tank, one of a handful of places in the country where he could be assured a friendly audience.

But the popularity of the messengers should not be confused with the popularity of their messages. Obama's speech came toward the end of a rough week for one of his signature issues—the return of the rule of law in the war on terror. Obama ran for President on a promise to close the government's notorious detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and in the first week of his new Administration he directed that it be shuttered and its inmates released or dispersed to other locations by January, 2010. While he was figuring out the details of that process, he suffered a political ambush in the Senate, which voted

ninety to six to deny his request for eighty million dollars to shut down the prison, and, furthermore, voted to forbid that any inmates be transferred anywhere within the United States. Even by congressional standards, this was a cynical maneuver, since many of those voting aye had earlier supported the prison's closure. Where, one wonders, did the legislators think the Guantánamo alumni were going to be sent?

This question has confounded lawmakers ever since the Bush Administration came up with the misbegotten idea to open Guantánamo in early 2002. In a series of landmark cases before the Supreme Court, in 2004, 2006, and 2008, the Justices courageously repudiated the Bush Administration's attempts to deny basic rights to the Guantánamo prisoners, and,

in so doing, gave the new Administration a road map of sorts about how an honorable detention system might be devised. The core of Obama's speech was an attempt to describe how he would solve a problem that proved well beyond the capabilities—moral as well as legal—of the Bush Administration.

Like the law professor he once was, Obama divided the prisoners into "five distinct categories." The first, and least controversial, includes detainees who will simply be prosecuted in federal courts for violations of criminal laws. There is not enough admissible evidence to prosecute all two hundred and forty inmates currently in custody in this way, so, for a second group, Obama plans to revive military commissions—pared-down trials that have been used occasionally in the past but that the Bush Administration designed in a way that the Supreme Court found constitutionally defective. For a third group of detainees, Obama pledged to follow the orders of courts that have directed that those detainees be released, and with a fourth group of inmates he has agreed to continue Bush Administration efforts to transfer them to countries willing to accept them.

Finally, as Obama said, "there remains the question of detainees at Guantánamo who cannot be prosecuted yet who pose a clear danger to the American people. And I have to be honest here—this is the toughest single issue that we will face." This group, "who cannot be prosecuted for past crimes, in some cases because evidence may be tainted," might



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

be held in preventive detention, perhaps forever. It's a sobering thought, that Obama could consider approving this kind of long-term detention, and it remains to be seen how much evidence would be required to justify such an extraordinary step and how many cases it would involve. (To be fair, there were also some military officials and lawyers in the Bush Administration who worked in good faith to find a just way of handling this group.) In any case, it's hard to imagine any President agreeing to release people who, as Obama put it, "in effect, remain at war with the United States."

At a minimum, Obama seemed alive to the moral and legal ambiguities implied by the issue. Not so the former Vice-President, who chose to speak in a chilling code, in which methods of torture such as waterboarding became "enhanced interrogation," in the way that death might be called "enhanced sleep." Cheney delivered his indictment of the current Administration in the same tone of certainty that he once used to inform the nation of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; of the connections between the government of Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 hijackers; and of the prospects for quick victory in Iraq. In light of this, it's hard to take seriously the claims that Cheney asked us to accept: to name just two, that the information obtained by torture saved lives; and that the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib was solely the work of "a

few sadistic prison guards," and not the result of interrogation practices approved by Cheney himself.

Even worse than Cheney's distortions was the political agenda behind them. The speech was, as politicians say, a marker—a warning to the new Administration. "Just remember: it is a serious step to begin unravelling some of the very policies that have kept our people safe since 9/11," Cheney said. "Seven and a half years without a repeat is not a record to be rebuked and scorned, much less criminalized. It is a record to be continued until the danger has passed." Cheney's all but explicit message was that the blame for any new attack against American people or interests would be laid not on the terrorists, or on the worldwide climate of anti-Americanism created by the Bush-Cheney Administration, but on Barack Obama. For many months after the 9/11 attacks, Democrats refrained from engaging in the blame game with the Bush Administration. Cheney's speech makes it clear that, should terrorists strike again, Republicans may not respond in kind.

Cheney's political acumen is not to be underestimated, notwithstanding his image problems. Last week's lopsided Senate vote suggests that Republican mastery of the politics of national security (if not of national security itself) remains intact. During the campaign, the majority of voters came to support Obama's contention that a tradeoff be-

tween our values and our security is a false choice. (And John McCain largely agreed.) But the quick flight of most congressional Democrats from their President suggests just how difficult a political assignment Obama has given himself. Cheney, in proclaiming that another attack will prove that his policies were correct, is trying to undermine confidence in the new team in the White House. The President gave a persuasive speech last week, but it proved only that he has a lot more persuading to do.

—Jeffrey Toobin

INK WHY NOT?



Larry King has a new book out, an autobiography called "My Remarkable Journey." In it, he talks about a lot of things: growing up in Brooklyn (stickball, potato kugel), doing odd jobs (U.P.S., Borden's milk), moving to Florida (where he changed his name from Zeiger, at the suggestion of a station manager who was looking at a newspaper ad for King's Wholesale Liquors), dating ("The only experience I had to compare it with at the time was what I felt for the Dodgers"), becoming successful ("If you were living in Miami, I was everywhere you looked or listened"), marrying, divorcing, dating some more (he put the moves on Katie Couric), marrying some more (seven women, eight times), having two sons with his current wife, Shawn Southwick-King ("We gave him the name Cannon because he was conceived on a street by that name"), interviewing ("One of the things I always try to do is ask questions that begin with the word *why*"). Last week, King's publicist Howard Rubenstein, who said, "Larry's been in some pickles and out of some pickles," threw a party for him, at Rubenstein's apartment on Fifth Avenue. Before it got started, King agreed to submit to an interview. The interviewer decided to use the Larry King Technique. Besides "why," there were a few other parameters: don't show bias, don't recite facts, "don't ask ques-



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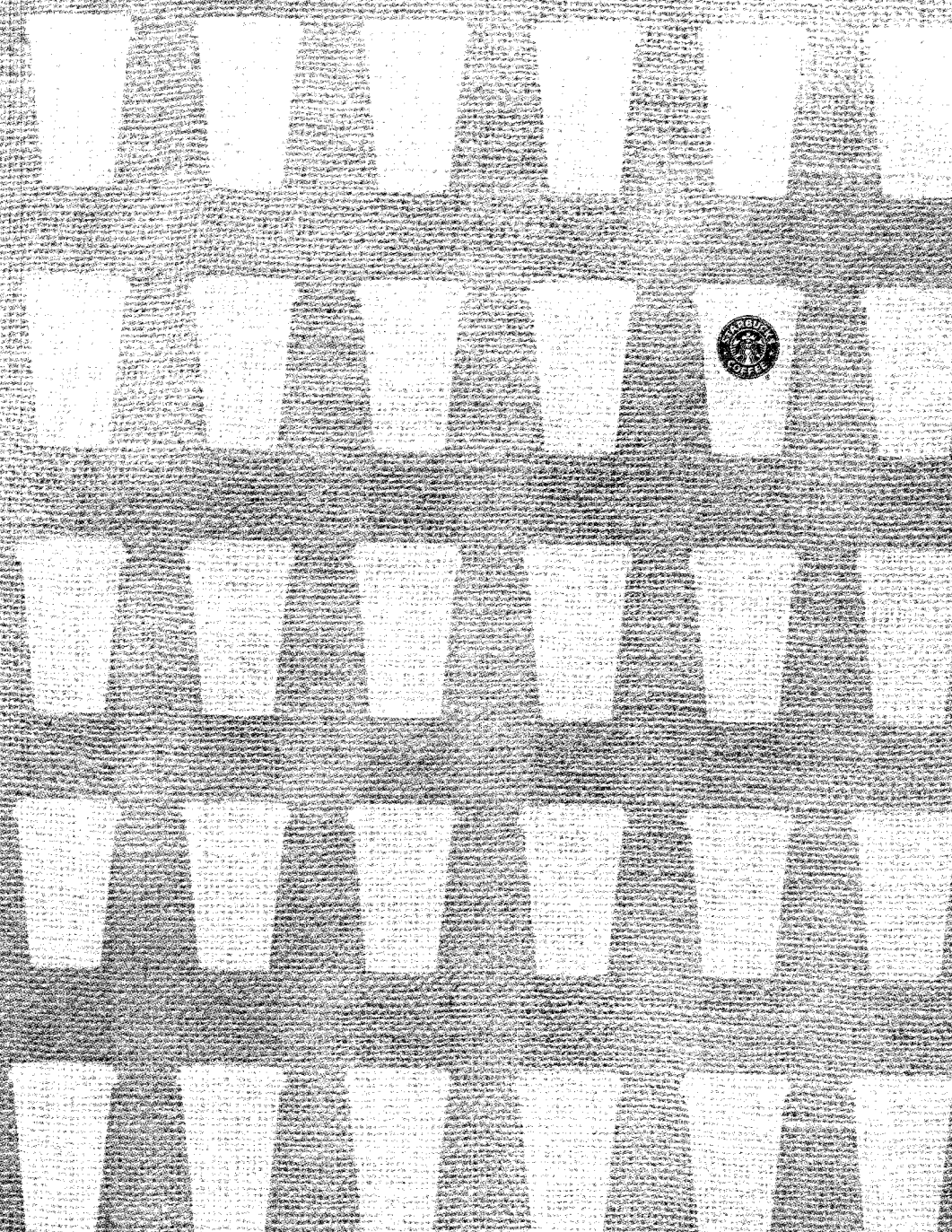
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tions that go over, tops, two sentences.”

Q.: Why did you write this book?

A.: I was about to be seventy-five years old. And a bunch of friends said, “You know, you’re not known as an author, you host shows.” I said, “No one can deny I’ve had an interesting life. Let’s put it down.”

Q.: Why did you get married so much?

A.: I don’t have an answer. Well, the last one’s twelve years, so I don’t even think of it multiply anymore. And one of them was annulled. But what I think is, friends started going into the Army. I didn’t. I never lived with anyone. In fact, I have no memory of spending the night with someone, getting up the next day.

Q.: Really? Never?

A.: I swear to God. I like to go home. So when I met someone and I had strong feelings, I got married, and when it didn’t work I got divorced. Now, I sometimes question people who are married for fifty years. How much compromise did *they* make? I don’t like that. I don’t like to give up things—especially if I’m sitting there in a house and now I’m bored. Why would I want to be bored?

Q.: Surely you’ve compromised something? (Bias may have been showing.)

A.: I’ll tell you the only thing I’ve compromised: lateness. Shawn is perpetually late. I’m never late. I mean, for example, my limo wasn’t there today at ten to six. I’m due here at six. That was a total panic to me. So I got a cab.

The interviewer asked about a reference in the book to King singing rap songs. “Cannon was listening to rap one day, and I said, ‘I can do that,’” King said. Wearing lavender Turnbull & Asser suspenders, a striped shirt, black slacks, and a couple of Cartier bangles that Shawn had given him, to “represent romance and friendship and love,” King began to freestyle:

So I’m goin’ through the store / and I wanna go more / Up the stairs / Down to the room / What am I gonna do? / In the room / the room brings me gloom / should I go to the room if it brings me gloom? / Could bring me doom / Why go to the room?

When he finished, he said, “The trouble with rap is you can’t hum it.”

Earlier that day, Gawker had run a post titled “Shocker: Larry King’s Horsey Tale Is Full of Holes.” It pointed out that an anecdote in the book, about King winning

big at the track just as he was about to go broke in 1972, couldn’t have happened in the year that he said it did. The interviewer followed up. “Confession—I don’t follow Web sites,” King said. “I have a Web site through CNN, I have a Twicker—what do they call it?—but I dictate it and someone else does it for me.”

Barbara Walters had come to the party. So had Diana Ross, Regis Philbin, Judge Judy. King’s interviewer asked a few guests what they would like to ask King.

Ray Kelly, the police commissioner: “Why does he always say ‘Albuquerque, New Mexico’ like that?”

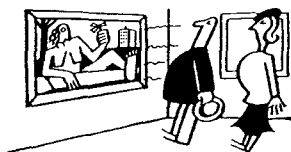
Donald Trump: “I would never ask him the kinds of questions I want to ask him, because I don’t want to hurt him.”

Anderson Cooper: “I just interviewed him for my show. I asked him about the car ride with Jessica Hahn where she put her foot in his crotch.”

Larry King, Jr., who did not meet his father until he was thirty-three, asked, “If he could change one thing in his life, what would it be?”

—Lauren Collins

THE PICTURES ART ATTACK



Bleary-eyed parents, packed in alongside their children at the new sequel “Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian”—the tale of an Egyptian tchotchke that brings a museum’s exhibits to life every night—may sit up one touch less bleary-eyed as they see on the screen, among the whizzing biplanes and marauding Egyptian warriors, a handful of newly enlivened works of blue-chip modern art. There is an animated (and occasionally talkative) Degas ballerina, a Jackson Pollock poured painting, a Mark Rothko rectangle, Edward Hopper’s “Nighthawks,” a Calder stabile, a weeping girl by Roy Lichtenstein, and even a Jeff Koons balloon puppy.

If the startled parent managed to reach Shawn Levy, the Montreal-born auteur who created the “N.A.T.M.” franchise, he or she would learn that inserting the art collection within the broader lines of the

farce was a personal project, born equally of the desire to enlarge the range of the movie and to make his two young daughters more interested in museumgoing. “We knew we wanted more art work coming to life,” Levy said, over the phone from Los Angeles. “We wanted it to seem rich, not just louder and messier. The idea of having Rodin’s ‘Thinker’ come to life was there in the script, and so was the idea of having Ben Stiller end up in the Eisenstadt photograph of V-J Day. But I quickly realized that I had this massive art-gallery set that needed to be filled. So I started making a mental list of art, even so-called difficult art, that I would like to see come alive. I curated a dream exhibit, combining works of art that never get to be under the same roof. The fun was imagining what each piece would be like if it could interact with the other pieces.”

Acquiring the rights to depict the art works in the movie was a minor procedural nightmare (lubricated, presumably, by studio cash). “We had to ask permission from each of the artists or their estates, and it was a double clearance issue—not only asking permission to show the work but also to animate it. The one artist who turned us down outright was Claes Oldenburg. I wanted to use his clothespin. I wrote Oldenburg a letter saying that his whimsy, the re-perception of the pedestrian, was much the same as what I was trying to do in the movie. But he seemed unmoved by the argument.” Jasper Johns allowed the producers to use one of his pictures—“Three Flags,” from 1958—but would not give them permission to animate it. In the film it sits there, Johns-like, watching. “But the others all said yes,” Levy said. “The nice thing was that they didn’t ask to monitor the visual effects.”

Levy set to work with his visual-effects team to bring the *musée imaginaire* to life. “I knew that I wanted the Calder to move on its three legs with an insectlike stride, freely swinging its mobile trunk. And I knew that I wanted the waiter in ‘Nighthawks’ to defend himself from the weird modern people outside his frame. With the Pollock, I knew that I wanted it squirming with intestinal motion. I wanted innards, or a pit of worms and snakes, all of them writhing in a fluid way.

“Maybe my favorite moment is the Lichtenstein girl’s teary reaction to the snowball thrown at Ben Stiller”—from out of a newly invented, Glackens-like

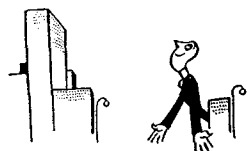
winter landscape. "I wanted to go against what would be expected, so she wipes away the tear and participates as an enthusiastic observer of the gallery around her. I like the Koons puppy, too. I knew I wanted him bouncing around, but it was the animators who came up with the notion that he would lose control of his own gravity, and his hindquarters would start floating upwards."

The reactions of Levy's two daughters, Sophie and Tess, proved the enterprise's success. Levy recently visited the Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM) with his children. "The girls had been with me during the filming," Levy recalled, "and in the BCAM they said, 'Look, Dad, there's a Koons here! And a Lichtenstein there!' They had touchstones. It was kind of thrilling—they've been to many museums, but I've never seen them engaged to this extent." He went on, "I didn't create these movies with an educational agenda, but it's been one of the truly satisfying aspects of my career that our first movie actually increased attendance at the American Museum of Natural History."

Fathers in the audience, Levy confided, have been particularly impressed by another artistic visual effect: the actor Amy Adams, who plays Amelia Earhart, in jodhpurs. "I spent two years working on this highly complex movie, loaded with FX and C.G.I. stuff, and the most memorable visual turns out to be Amy's, uh, rear in her jodhpurs."

—Adam Gopnik

FOREIGN EXCHANGE HELL'S KITCHEN



For the record, the Italian actor Roberto Benigni does not believe that New Yorkers are going to Hell. "I hope they go to Paradise, every one of them," he said last Thursday, in the back seat of a taxi, blinking against the swish and roar of traffic. But that might be because he thinks it's a journey the city's residents have already made. "This is the beginning of Hell," he said. "The deeper we go, the greater the range of utterances of grief and fury we will hear. Different colors of people. Slang! Obscenity! Curses! Sighs!

Keening!" He paused while a van blasted its air horn. "This is really the *sound of Hell*," he said. "But we need to pass through the *Inferno* to reach Paradise."

Benigni was last seen in the United States scrambling across seat backs to claim the Academy Award for "Life Is Beautiful," his 1997 comedy set in a concentration camp. More recently, he has



Roberto Benigni

immersed himself in a different kind of comedy: a one-man show in which he explains, recites, and riffs on Dante. His act, which is called "Tutto Dante," is an unlikely success, running from Italian political satire to careful dissection of the poet's verses, capped by a dramatic recitation in the original medieval Italian. He has performed it to packed theatres all over Europe, and next week he will headline the Hammerstein Ballroom with an English version of the show.

In his American performances, he plans to tackle Canto V, the tragic story of the adulterous lovers Paolo and Francesca. But arriving in New York had put him in mind of another verse, from Canto XXVI, in which the poet, clinging to a cliff, looks down on the damned. "When I arrive in an airplane and I see New York, many, many times it reminds me of this canto," he said. "Billions and billions of little lights, like fireflies, and every little light hiding a sinner."

The traffic lurched forward. "But it's so beautiful," Benigni said. "Every single corner of New York. This is a miracle. You cannot find, not a moment, when you say,

'This is vulgar or rude.' You feel everything is a friend to you and the opposite of Hell. This is Hell and Paradise together.

"Times Square!" he said, as the lit-up signs came into view. "In Italian, it's Piazza del Tempo. I must tell some Italian to dedicate a square to time."

The taxi turned on Thirty-ninth Street, and as it cruised through the garment district Benigni pressed his face against the window. "You see these . . . how do you say *gru*?" he asked. "The cranes. In Dante's *Inferno*, everybody is working, scaffolding here and there. There's been an earthquake in Hell, so everybody is working. There's no peace. No rest. Like here. It's incredible."

Heading south on Ninth Avenue, an orange ambulance fired its sirens. At Thirty-fourth Street, Benigni got out. The Empire State Building rose in the east. "In the very, very deep Hell, there are four giants," he said. "But Dante thinks they are buildings, four skyscrapers." Benigni stopped so suddenly that a man twice his size almost ran into him.

"Watch your back," the man said.

"But they are not skyscrapers," Benigni continued. "They move suddenly. They are four giants. One of them took Dante up, like this." He squatted and scooped his hand slowly, just above the sidewalk.

Under a stretch of scaffolding, a man wearing a dirty sweatshirt leaned against a wall. His eyes were closed. A cigarette hung from a frozen grin. Benigni pointed. "You see? Smiling, a man like this? In Hell, you can find this description." Another few steps. "Look!" A hot-dog cart exhaled white smoke. Above it, in red letters, rose a sign for a movie theatre: "LOEWS-34th." "The thirty-fourth is the canto where he's describing the Devil in person," Benigni said. "Physically! Every single hair of the Devil."

Benigni entered the Hammerstein Ballroom, across the street, to check out where he would be performing. He wandered toward the back, where grips wrestled flats onto the empty stage. A forklift let out a hydraulic hiss. "Look at these walls," Benigni said. An exit sign glowed red in the gloom. His finger traced a line up the wall and across the ceiling. High above the balconies, in painted fresco, angels and cherubs peered over a marble balustrade. "And here," he said, "begins the zone of Paradise."

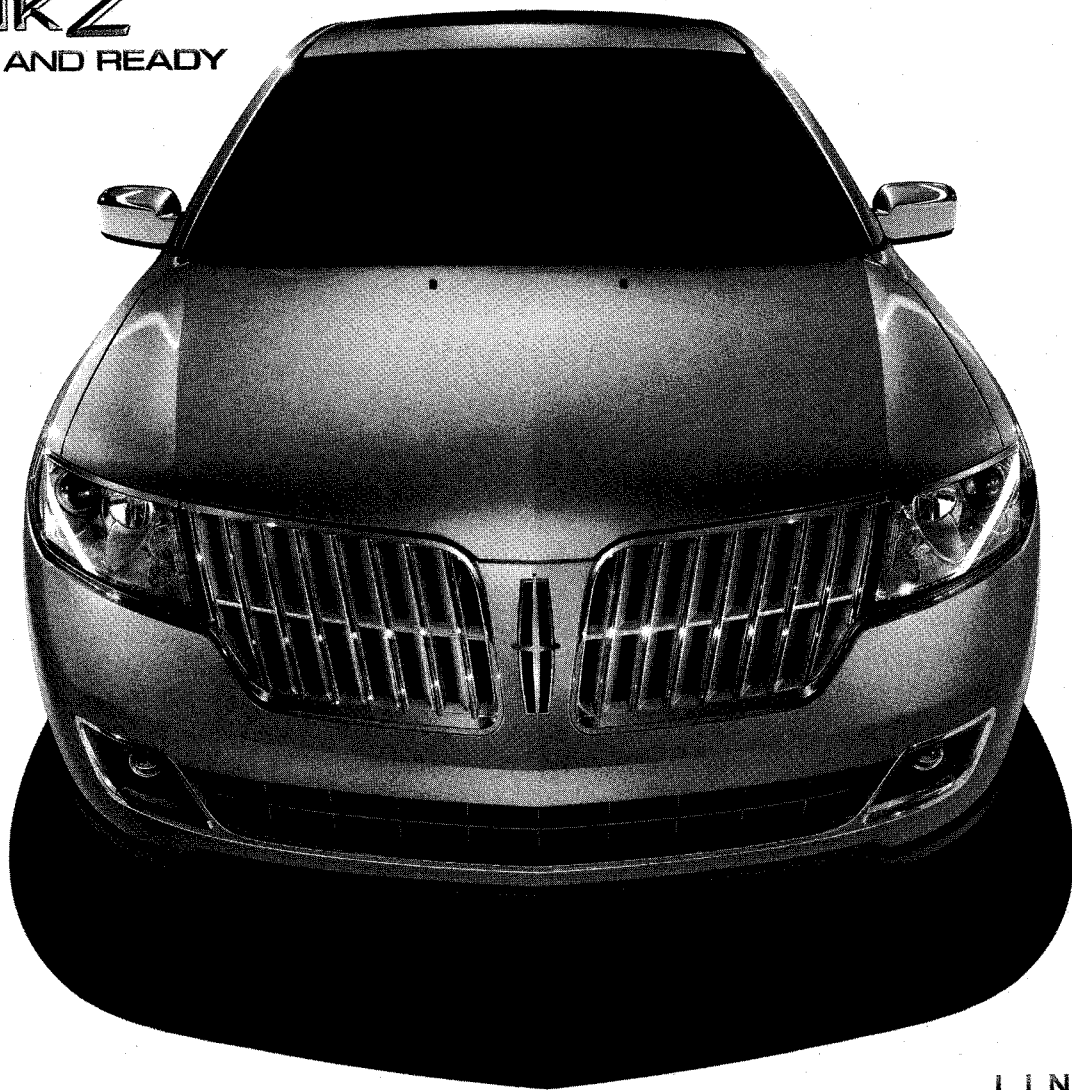
—Stephan Faris

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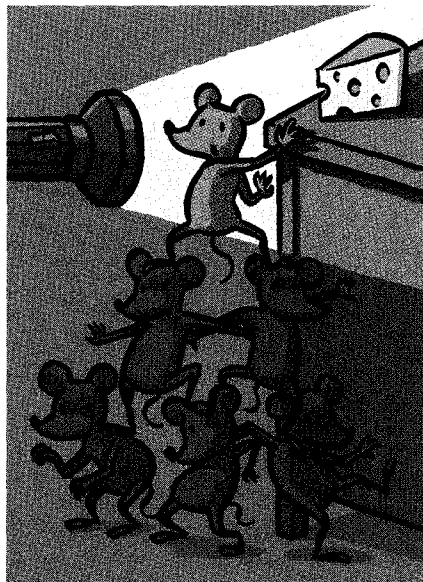
When Citigroup and Bank of America held their annual meetings last month, shareholders were in an understandably surly mood. Even as the companies' C.E.O.s apologized for past failures and vowed to do better, shareholders blasted the executives for their incompetence, and talked about the need for dramatic change. Yet, after all the venting and repenting was done, something weird happened: every member of each bank's board of directors was reelected to office.

This may seem odd, but it was all too predictable. In the apportioning of blame for the financial crisis, corporate boards of directors have remained remarkably unscathed, even though they effectively approved the strategies that immolated so many companies. At Citigroup, for instance, there have been plenty of calls for Vikram Pandit, who took over as C.E.O. long after most of the damage to the bank was done, to leave. Yet Citi's board still includes ten of the individuals who presided over the company during its lengthy foray into toxic-asset land. (And the record at Citi, where four board members did step down a couple of months ago, is actually better than at most big banks, where there has been next to no turnover.) There are hopes that this situation may change, since the Obama Administration, as part of its stress test, required banks to "review their existing management." But so far, even as everyone rails against the banks' disastrous behavior, boards have not been punished for failing to stop it.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Over the past couple of decades, a tremendous amount of attention has been devoted to improving corporate boards. New regulations, along with pressure from big investors, have forced companies to appoint more independent directors—people who have no direct connection to the company—and have tightened the definition of independence. And companies themselves have tried to draw from a wider pool of candidates. The result of these changes is that boards certainly look different: in 1950, half of all directors were insiders. Today, fewer than twenty per cent are. Boards are also more demo-

graphically and professionally diverse. And they're paid more sensibly: increasingly, directors are compensated with company stock, making it more likely that they'll look after shareholder interests.

All these changes, though, have had a much smaller impact than expected. The academics Sanjai Bhagat and Bernard Black, for instance, have found no evidence that simply appointing more independent directors improves corporate performance. And, while increasing diversity was, in theory, going to break up the old boys' club and make boards less deferential, the benefits have proved more elusive in reality. James Westphal, a business professor at the University of Michigan, has found that professionally diverse boards



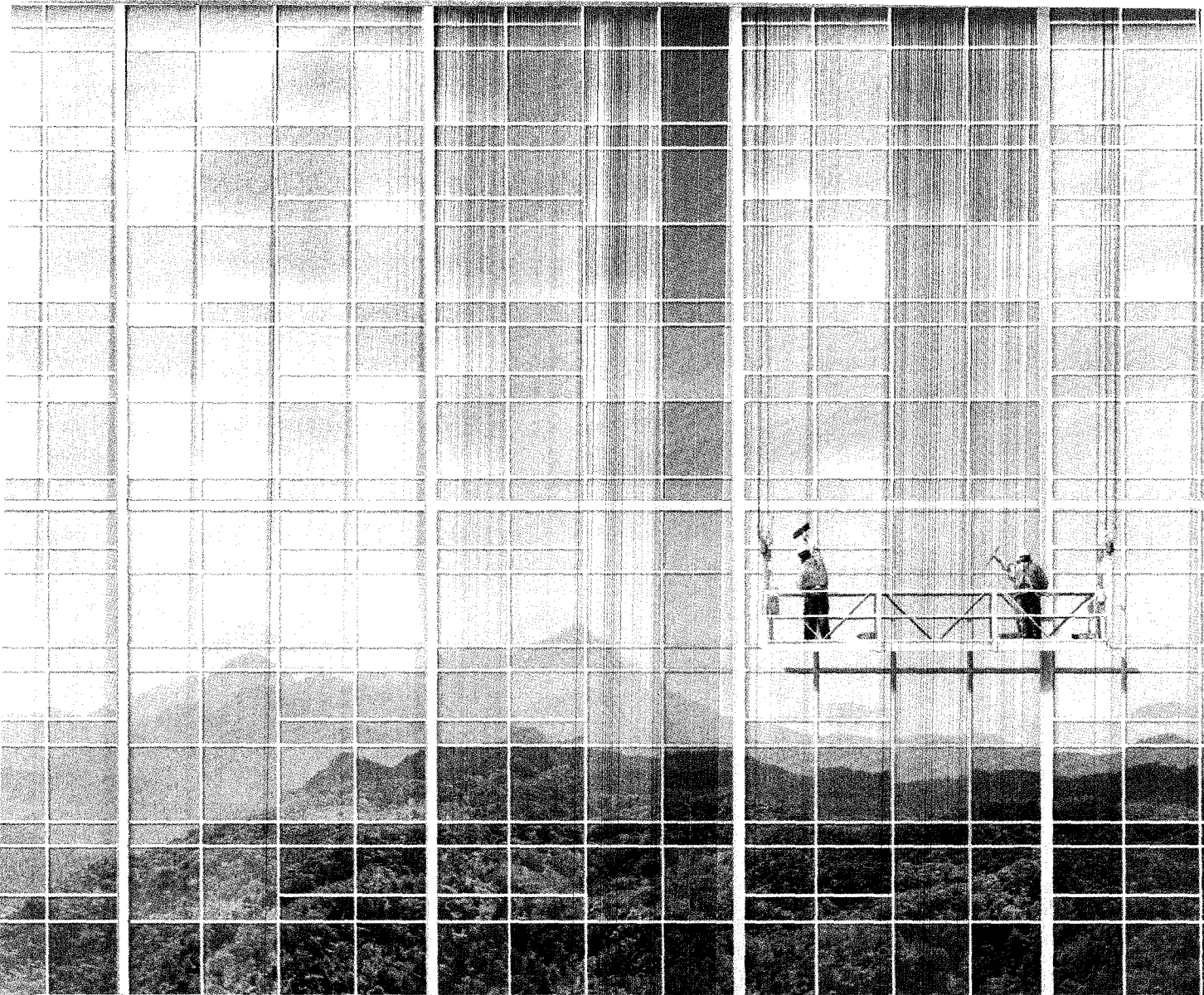
are actually less likely to challenge the C.E.O. One reason is that even "independent" directors are typically nominated not by shareholders but by the C.E.O. or by other board members, who, not surprisingly, tend to prefer directors who will be cheerleaders for the firm and won't rock the boat. It also doesn't help that independent directors are sometimes inexperienced, which makes it harder for them to take on management, or that they're often chosen for name recognition. Why, for instance, is Tommy Franks on Bank of America's board?

This doesn't mean that we should go back to the bad old days of boards made up of cronies and old white guys. But changing the way boards look matters less than changing the way they act. Directors

are still part-time employees—the typical board meets just eight times a year—so it's hard for them to devote enough time to make a meaningful difference. And they're paid both too much and, paradoxically, not enough: too much in the sense that a directorship is often a cushy gig, which no one wants to endanger by challenging the boss; not enough in that their compensation isn't sufficient for them to be hurt if the company flounders. Directors still rely heavily on the C.E.O. for information, and do little independent digging—one recent survey found that half of them wished they had more information about company strategy. And board meetings still tend to work the way Warren Buffett described them: collegiality trumps independence. True, boards are more active than they were, and more willing to show underperforming C.E.O.s the door (as happened at both Merrill Lynch and Citigroup). But they often react too late, after the real damage has been done. And the fact that boards see their chief job as hiring and firing the C.E.O. is a problem: shareholders need boards to prevent messes, not just clean up afterward.

Easier said than done, perhaps. But there are ways to make boards proactive and more than nominally independent. Investors need to be able to play a much bigger role in determining who ends up on boards, nominating candidates themselves, instead of choosing among the C.E.O.'s picks. (The S.E.C. is currently considering a proposal to make it easier for big shareholders to do this, which would be a good start.) On top of that, it's time to revive an idea that was first floated by the corporate-law scholars Ronald Gilson and Reinier Kraakman, who proposed that big institutional investors create a cadre of full-time directors, people whose only job would be to sit on corporate boards and look after shareholder value. Most board members, accomplished as they may be in their real jobs, are amateurs when it comes to being directors. So it shouldn't surprise us when they get buffaloed or pushed around by C.E.O.s, who are professionals. Right now, boards are made up of moonlighters. And, if the last few years have shown anything, it's that protecting shareholder interests is a full-time job.

—James Surowiecki



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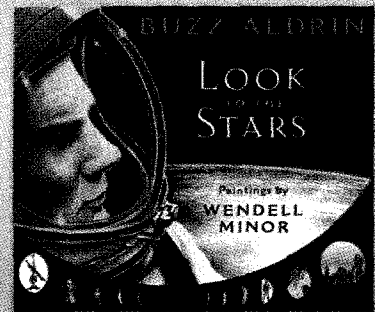
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ANNALS OF MEDICINE

THE COST CONUNDRUM

What a Texas town can teach us about health care.

BY ATUL GAWANDE

It is spring in McAllen, Texas. The morning sun is warm. The streets are lined with palm trees and pickup trucks. McAllen is in Hidalgo County, which has the lowest household income in the country, but it's a border town, and a thriving foreign-trade zone has kept the unemployment rate below ten per cent. McAllen calls itself the Square Dance Capital of the World. "Lonesome Dove" was set around here.

McAllen has another distinction, too: it is one of the most expensive health-care markets in the country. Only Miami—which has much higher labor and living costs—spends more per person on health care. In 2006, Medicare spent fifteen thousand dollars per enrollee here, almost twice the national average. The income per capita is twelve thousand dollars. In other words, Medicare spends three thousand dollars more per person here than the average person earns.

The explosive trend in American medical costs seems to have occurred here in an especially intense form. Our country's health care is by far the most expensive in the world. In Washington, the aim of health-care reform is not just to extend medical coverage to everybody but also to bring costs under control. Spending on doctors, hospitals, drugs, and the like now consumes more than one of every six dollars we earn. The financial burden has damaged the global competitiveness of American businesses and bankrupted millions of families, even those with insurance. It's also devouring our government. "The greatest threat to America's fiscal health is not Social Security," President Barack Obama said in a March speech at the White House. "It's not the investments that we've made to rescue our economy during this crisis. By a wide margin, the biggest threat to our nation's balance sheet is the skyrocketing cost of health care. It's not even close."

The question we're now frantically grappling with is how this came to be,

and what can be done about it. McAllen, Texas, the most expensive town in the most expensive country for health care in the world, seemed a good place to look for some answers.

From the moment I arrived, I asked almost everyone I encountered about McAllen's health costs—a businessman I met at the five-gate McAllen-Miller International Airport, the desk clerks at the Embassy Suites Hotel, a police-academy cadet at McDonald's. Most weren't surprised to hear that McAllen was an outlier. "Just look around," the cadet said. "People are not healthy here." McAllen, with its high poverty rate, has an incidence of heavy drinking sixty per cent higher than the national average. And the Tex-Mex diet has contributed to a thirty-eight-per-cent obesity rate.

One day, I went on rounds with Lester Dyke, a weather-beaten, ranch-owning fifty-three-year-old cardiac surgeon who grew up in Austin, did his surgical training with the Army all over the country, and settled into practice in Hidalgo County. He has not lacked for business: in the past twenty years, he has done some eight thousand heart operations, which exhausts me just thinking about it. I walked around with him as he checked in on ten or so of his patients who were recuperating at the three hospitals where he operates. It was easy to see what had landed them under his knife. They were nearly all obese or diabetic or both. Many had a family history of heart disease. Few were taking preventive measures, such as cholesterol-lowering drugs, which, studies indicate, would have obviated surgery for up to half of them.

Yet public-health statistics show that cardiovascular-disease rates in the county are actually lower than average, probably because its smoking rates are quite low. Rates of asthma, H.I.V., infant mortality, cancer, and injury are lower, too. El Paso County, eight hundred miles up the

border, has essentially the same demographics. Both counties have a population of roughly seven hundred thousand, similar public-health statistics, and similar percentages of non-English speakers, illegal immigrants, and the unemployed. Yet in 2006 Medicare expenditures (our best approximation of over-all spending patterns) in El Paso were \$7,504 per enrollee—half as much as in McAllen. An unhealthy population couldn't possibly be the reason that McAllen's health-care costs are so high. (Or the reason that America's are. We may be more obese than any other industrialized nation, but we have among the lowest rates of smoking and alcoholism, and we are in the middle of the range for cardiovascular disease and diabetes.)

Was the explanation, then, that McAllen was providing unusually good health care? I took a walk through Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, in Edinburg, one of the towns in the McAllen metropolitan area, with Robert Alleyn, a Houston-trained general surgeon who had grown up here and returned home to practice. The hospital campus sprawled across two city blocks, with a series of three- and four-story stucco buildings separated by golfing-green lawns and black asphalt parking lots. He pointed out the sights—the cancer center is over here, the heart center is over there, now we're coming to the imaging center. We went inside the surgery building. It was sleek and modern, with recessed lighting, classical music piped into the waiting areas, and nurses moving from patient to patient behind rolling black computer pods. We changed into scrubs and Alleyn took me through the sixteen operating rooms to show me the laparoscopy suite, with its flat-screen video monitors, the hybrid operating room with built-in imaging equipment, the surgical robot

for minimally invasive robotic surgery.

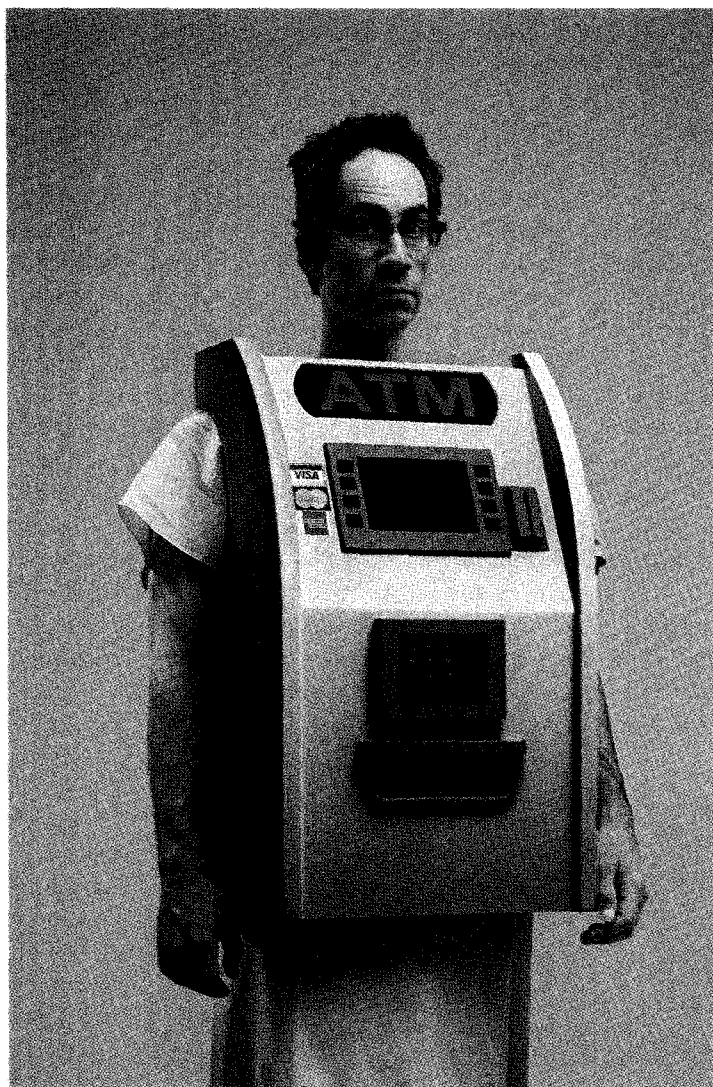
I was impressed. The place had virtually all the technology that you'd find at Harvard and Stanford and the Mayo Clinic, and, as I walked through that hospital on a dusty road in South Texas, this struck me as a remarkable thing. Rich towns get the new school buildings, fire trucks, and roads, not to mention the better teachers and police officers and

exist a few years ago. At Renaissance, I talked with a neonatologist who trained at my hospital, in Boston, and brought McAllen new skills and technologies for premature babies. "I've had nurses come up to me and say, 'I never knew these babies could survive,'" he said.

And yet there's no evidence that the treatments and technologies available at McAllen are better than those found elsewhere in the country.

The annual reports that hospitals file with Medicare show that those in McAllen and El Paso offer comparable technologies—neonatal intensive-care units, advanced cardiac services, PET scans, and so on. Public statistics show no difference in the supply of doctors. Hidalgo County actually has fewer specialists than the national average.

Nor does the care given in McAllen stand out for its quality. Medicare ranks hospitals on twenty-five metrics of care. On all but two of these, McAllen's five largest hospitals performed worse, on average, than El Paso's. McAllen costs Medicare seven thousand dollars more per person each year than does the average city in America. But not, so far as one can tell, because it's delivering better health care.



Costlier care is often worse care. Photograph by Phillip Toledano.

civil engineers. Poor towns don't. But that rule doesn't hold for health care.

At McAllen Medical Center, I saw an orthopedic surgeon work under an operating microscope to remove a tumor that had wrapped around the spinal cord of a fourteen-year-old. At a home-health agency, I spoke to a nurse who could provide intravenous-drug therapy for patients with congestive heart failure. At McAllen Heart Hospital, I watched Dyke and a team of six do a coronary-artery bypass using technologies that didn't

bread-and-butter physicians: busy, full-time, private-practice doctors who work from seven in the morning to seven at night and sometimes later, their waiting rooms teeming and their desks stacked with medical charts to review.

Some were dubious when I told them that McAllen was the country's most expensive place for health care. I gave them the spending data from Medicare. In 1992, in the McAllen market, the average cost per Medicare

One night, I went to dinner with six McAllen doctors. All were what you would call

enrollee was \$4,891, almost exactly the national average. But since then, year after year, McAllen's health costs have grown faster than any other market in the country, ultimately soaring by more than ten thousand dollars per person.

"Maybe the service is better here," the cardiologist suggested. People can be seen faster and get their tests more readily, he said.

Others were skeptical. "I don't think that explains the costs he's talking about," the general surgeon said.

"It's malpractice," a family physician who had practiced here for thirty-three years said.

"McAllen is legal hell," the cardiologist agreed. Doctors order unnecessary tests just to protect themselves, he said. Everyone thought the lawyers here were worse than elsewhere.

That explanation puzzled me. Several years ago, Texas passed a tough malpractice law that capped pain-and-suffering awards at two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Didn't lawsuits go down?

"Practically to zero," the cardiologist admitted.

"Come on," the general surgeon finally said. "We all know these arguments are bullshit. There is overutilization here, pure and simple." Doctors, he said, were

racking up charges with extra tests, services, and procedures.

The surgeon came to McAllen in the mid-nineties, and since then, he said, "the way to practice medicine has changed completely. Before, it was about how to do a good job. Now it is about 'How much will you benefit?'"

Everyone agreed that something fundamental had changed since the days when health-care costs in McAllen were the same as those in El Paso and elsewhere. Yes, they had more technology. "But young doctors don't think anymore," the family physician said.

The surgeon gave me an example. General surgeons are often asked to see patients with pain from gallstones. If there aren't any complications—and there usually aren't—the pain goes away on its own or with pain medication. With instruction on eating a lower-fat diet, most patients experience no further difficulties. But some have recurrent episodes, and need surgery to remove their gallbladder.

Seeing a patient who has had uncomplicated, first-time gallstone pain requires some judgment. A surgeon has to provide reassurance (people are often scared and want to go straight to surgery), some education about gallstone disease and diet, perhaps a prescription

for pain; in a few weeks, the surgeon might follow up. But increasingly, I was told, McAllen surgeons simply operate. The patient wasn't going to moderate her diet, they tell themselves. The pain was just going to come back. And by operating they happen to make an extra seven hundred dollars.

I gave the doctors around the table a scenario. A forty-year-old woman comes in with chest pain after a fight with her husband. An EKG is normal. The chest pain goes away. She has no family history of heart disease. What did McAllen doctors do fifteen years ago?

Send her home, they said. Maybe get a stress test to confirm that there's no issue, but even that might be overkill.

And today? Today, the cardiologist said, she would get a stress test, an echocardiogram, a mobile Holter monitor, and maybe even a cardiac catheterization.

"Oh, she's *definitely* getting a cath," the internist said, laughing grimly.

To determine whether overuse of medical care was really the problem in McAllen, I turned to Jonathan Skinner, an economist at Dartmouth's Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice, which has three decades of expertise in examining regional patterns in Medicare payment data. I also turned to two private firms—D2Hawkeye, an independent company, and Ingenix, UnitedHealthcare's data-analysis company—to analyze commercial insurance data for McAllen. The answer was yes. Compared with patients in El Paso and nationwide, patients in McAllen got more of pretty much everything—more diagnostic testing, more hospital treatment, more surgery, more home care.

The Medicare payment data provided the most detail. Between 2001 and 2005, critically ill Medicare patients received almost fifty per cent more specialist visits in McAllen than in El Paso, and were two-thirds more likely to see ten or more specialists in a six-month period. In 2005 and 2006, patients in McAllen received twenty per cent more abdominal ultrasounds, thirty per cent more bone-density studies, sixty per cent more stress tests with echocardiography, two hundred per cent more nerve-conduction studies to



"When you head off to camp, your parents will want to see some separation anxiety."

diagnose carpal-tunnel syndrome, and five hundred and fifty per cent more urine-flow studies to diagnose prostate troubles. They received one-fifth to two-thirds more gallbladder operations, knee replacements, breast biopsies, and bladder scopes. They also received two to three times as many pacemakers, implantable defibrillators, cardiac-bypass operations, carotid endarterectomies, and coronary-artery stents. And Medicare paid for five times as many home-nurse visits. The primary cause of McAllen's extreme costs was, very simply, the across-the-board overuse of medicine.

This is a disturbing and perhaps surprising diagnosis. Americans like to believe that, with most things, more is better. But research suggests that where medicine is concerned it may actually be worse. For example, Rochester, Minnesota, where the Mayo Clinic dominates the scene, has fantastically high levels of technological capability and quality, but its Medicare spending is in the lowest fifteen per cent of the country—\$6,688 per enrollee in 2006, which is eight thousand dollars less than the figure for McAllen. Two economists working at Dartmouth, Katherine Baicker and Amitabh Chandra, found that the more money Medicare spent per person in a given state the lower that state's quality ranking tended to be. In fact, the four states with the highest levels of spending—Louisiana, Texas, California, and Florida—were near the bottom of the national rankings on the quality of patient care.

In a 2003 study, another Dartmouth team, led by the internist Elliott Fisher, examined the treatment received by a million elderly Americans diagnosed with colon or rectal cancer, a hip fracture, or a heart attack. They found that patients in higher-spending regions received sixty per cent more care than elsewhere. They got more frequent tests and procedures, more visits with specialists, and more frequent admission to hospitals. Yet they did no better than other patients, whether this was measured in terms of survival, their ability to function, or satisfaction with the care they received. If anything, they seemed to do worse.

That's because nothing in medicine is without risks. Complications can arise from hospital stays, medications, procedures, and tests, and when these things are of marginal value the harm can be greater than the benefits. In recent years, we doctors have markedly increased the number of operations we do, for instance. In 2006, doctors performed at least sixty million surgical procedures, one for every five Americans. No other country does anything like as many operations on its citizens. Are we better off for it? No one knows for sure, but it seems highly unlikely. After all, some hundred thousand people die each year from complications of surgery—far more than die in car crashes.

To make matters worse, Fisher found that patients in high-cost areas were actually less likely to receive low-cost preventive services, such as flu and pneumonia vaccines, faced longer waits at doctor and emergency-room visits, and were less likely to have a primary-care physician. They got more of the stuff that cost more, but not more of what they needed.

In an odd way, this news is reassuring. Universal coverage won't be feasible unless we can control costs. Policymakers have worried that doing so would require rationing, which the public would never go along with. So the idea that there's plenty of fat in the system is proving deeply attractive. "Nearly thirty per cent of Medicare's costs could be saved without negatively affecting health outcomes if spending in high- and medium-cost areas could be reduced to the level in low-cost areas," Peter Orszag, the President's budget director, has stated.

Most Americans would be delighted to have the quality of care found in places like Rochester, Minnesota, or Seattle, Washington, or Durham, North Carolina—all of which have world-class hospitals and costs that fall below the national average. If we brought the cost curve in the expensive places down to their level, Medicare's problems (indeed, almost all the federal government's budget problems for the next fifty years) would be solved. The difficulty is how to go about it. Physicians in places like McAllen behave differently from oth-

ers. The \$2.4-trillion question is why. Unless we figure it out, health reform will fail.

I had what I considered to be a reasonable plan for finding out what was going on in McAllen. I would call on the heads of its hospitals, in their swanky, decorator-designed, *churrigueresco* offices, and I'd ask them.

The first hospital I visited, McAllen Heart Hospital, is owned by Universal Health Services, a for-profit hospital chain with headquarters in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and revenues of five billion dollars last year. I went to see the hospital's chief operating officer, Gilda Romero. Truth be told, her office seemed less *churrigueresco* than Office Depot. She had straight brown hair, sympathetic eyes, and looked more like a young school teacher than like a corporate officer with nineteen years of experience. And when I inquired, "What is going on in this place?" she looked surprised.

Is McAllen really that expensive? she asked.

I described the data, including the numbers indicating that heart operations and catheter procedures and pacemakers were being performed in McAllen at double the usual rate.

"That is *interesting*," she said, by which she did not mean, "Uh-oh, you've caught us" but, rather, "That is actually interesting." The problem of McAllen's outlandish costs was new to her. She puzzled over the numbers. She was certain that her doctors performed surgery only when it was necessary. It had to be one of the other hospitals. And she had one in mind—Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, the hospital in Edinburg that I had toured.

She wasn't the only person to mention Renaissance. It is the newest hospital in the area. It is physician-owned. And it has a reputation (which it disclaims) for aggressively recruiting high-volume physicians to become investors and send patients there. Physicians who do so receive not only their fee for whatever service they provide but also a percentage of the hospital's profits from the tests, surgery, or other care patients are given. (In 2007, its profits totalled thirty-four million dollars.) Romero and others argued that this

gives physicians an unholy temptation to overorder.

Such an arrangement can make physician investors rich. But it can't be the whole explanation. The hospital gets barely a sixth of the patients in the region; its margins are no bigger than the other hospitals'—whether for profit or not for profit—and it didn't have much of a presence until 2004 at the earliest, a full decade after the cost explosion in McAllen began.

"Those are good points," Romero said. She couldn't explain what was going on.

The following afternoon, I visited the top managers of Doctors Hospital at Renaissance. We sat in their boardroom around one end of a yacht-length table. The chairman of the board offered me a soda. The chief of staff smiled at me. The chief financial officer shook my hand as if I were an old friend. The C.E.O., however, was having a hard time pretending that he was happy to see me. Lawrence Gelman was a fifty-seven-year-old anesthesiologist with a Bill Clinton shock of white hair and a weekly local radio show tag-lined "Opinions from an Unrelenting Conservative Spirit." He had helped found the hospital. He barely greeted me, and while the others were trying for a how-can-I-help-you-today attitude, his body language was more let's-get-this-over-with.

So I asked him why McAllen's health-care costs were so high. What he gave me was a disquisition on the theory and history of American health-care financing going back to Lyndon Johnson and the creation of Medicare, the upshot of which was: (1) Government is the problem in health care. "The people in charge of the purse strings don't know what they're doing." (2) If anything, government insurance programs like Medicare don't pay enough. "I, as an anesthesiologist, know that they pay me ten per cent of what a private insurer pays." (3) Government programs are full of waste. "Every person in this room could easily go through the expenditures of Medicare and Medicaid and see all kinds of waste." (4) But not in McAllen. The clinicians here, at least at Doctors Hospital at Renaissance, "are providing necessary, essential health care," Gelman said. "We don't invent patients."

Then why do hospitals in McAllen order so much more surgery and scans

and tests than hospitals in El Paso and elsewhere?

In the end, the only explanation he and his colleagues could offer was this: The other doctors and hospitals in McAllen may be overspending, but, to the extent that his hospital provides costlier treatment than other places in the country, it is making people better in ways that data on quality and outcomes do not measure.

"Do we provide better health care than El Paso?" Gelman asked. "I would bet you two to one that we do."

It was a depressing conversation—not because I thought the executives were being evasive but because they weren't being evasive. The data on McAllen's costs were clearly new to them. They were defending McAllen reflexively. But they really didn't know the big picture of what was happening.

And, I realized, few people in their position do. Local executives for hospitals and clinics and home-health agencies understand their growth rate and their market share; they know whether they are losing money or making money. They know that if their doctors bring in enough business—surgery, imaging, home-nursing referrals—they make money; and if they get the doctors to bring in more, they make more. But they have only the vaguest notion of whether the doctors are making their communities as healthy as they can, or whether they are more or less efficient than their counterparts elsewhere. A doctor sees a patient in clinic, and has her check into a McAllen hospital for a CT scan, an ultrasound, three rounds of blood tests, another ultrasound, and then surgery to have her gallbladder removed. How is Lawrence Gelman or Gilda Romero to know whether all that is essential, let alone the best possible treatment for the patient? It isn't what they are responsible or accountable for.

Health-care costs ultimately arise from the accumulation of individual decisions doctors make about which services and treatments to write an order for. The most expensive piece of medical equip-

ment, as the saying goes, is a doctor's pen. And, as a rule, hospital executives don't own the pen caps. Doctors do.

If doctors wield the pen, why do they do it so differently from one place to another? Brenda Sirovich, another Dartmouth researcher, published a study last year that provided an important clue. She and her team surveyed some eight hundred primary-care physicians from high-cost cities (such as Las Vegas and New York), low-cost cities (such as Sacramento and Boise), and others in between. The researchers asked the physicians specifically how they would handle a variety of patient cases. It turned out that differences in decision-making emerged in only some kinds of cases. In situations in which the right thing to do was well established—for example, whether to recommend a mammogram for a fifty-year-old woman (the answer is yes)—physicians in high- and low-cost cities made the same decisions. But, in cases in which the science was unclear, some physicians pursued the maximum possible amount of testing and procedures; some pursued the minimum. And which kind of doctor they were depended on where they came from.

Sirovich asked doctors how they would treat a seventy-five-year-old woman with typical heartburn symptoms and "adequate health insurance to cover tests and medications." Physicians in high- and low-cost cities were equally likely to prescribe antacid therapy and to check for *H. pylori*, an ulcer-causing bacterium—steps strongly recommended by national guidelines. But when it came to measures of less certain value—and higher cost—the differences were considerable. More than seventy per cent of physicians in high-cost cities referred the patient to a gastroenterologist, ordered an upper endoscopy, or both, while half as many in low-cost cities did. Physicians from high-cost cities typically recommended that patients with well-controlled hypertension see them in the office every one to three months, while those from low-cost cities recommended visits twice yearly. In case after uncertain case, more was not necessarily better. But physicians from the most expensive cities did the most expensive things.

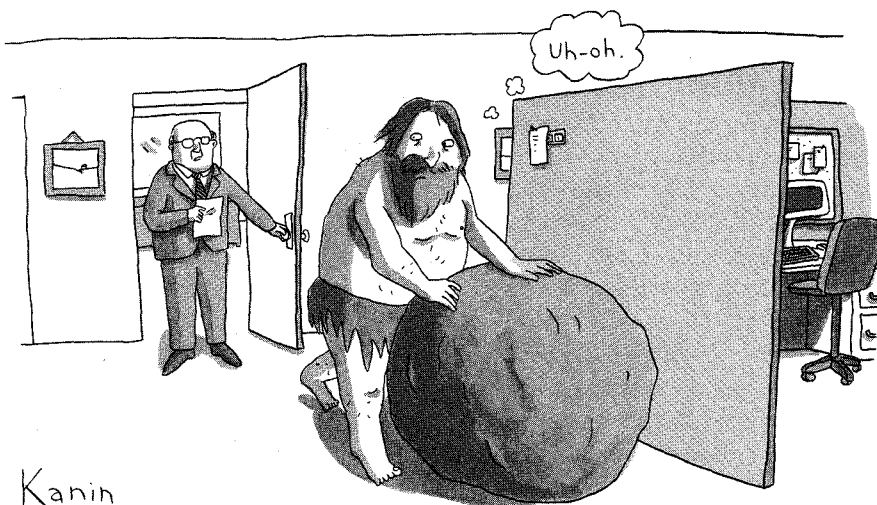


Why? Some of it could reflect differences in training. I remember when my wife brought our infant son Walker to visit his grandparents in Virginia, and he took a terrifying fall down a set of stairs. They drove him to the local community hospital in Alexandria. A CT scan showed that he had a tiny subdural hematoma—a small area of bleeding in the brain. During ten hours of observation, though, he was fine—eating, drinking, completely alert. I was a surgery resident then and had seen many cases like his. We observed each child in intensive care for at least twenty-four hours and got a repeat CT scan. That was how I'd been trained. But the doctor in Alexandria was going to send Walker home. That was how he'd been trained. Suppose things change for the worse? I asked him. It's extremely unlikely, he said, and if anything changed Walker could always be brought back. I bullied the doctor into admitting him anyway. The next day, the scan and the patient were fine. And, looking in the textbooks, I learned that the doctor was right. Walker could have been managed safely either way.

There was no sign, however, that McAllen's doctors as a group were trained any differently from El Paso's. One morning, I met with a hospital administrator who had extensive experience managing for-profit hospitals along the border. He offered a different possible explanation: the culture of money.

"In El Paso, if you took a random doctor and looked at his tax returns eighty-five per cent of his income would come from the usual practice of medicine," he said. But in McAllen, the administrator thought, that percentage would be a lot less.

He knew of doctors who owned strip malls, orange groves, apartment complexes—or imaging centers, surgery centers, or another part of the hospital they directed patients to. They had "entrepreneurial spirit," he said. They were innovative and aggressive in finding ways to increase revenues from patient care. "There's no lack of work ethic," he said. But he had often seen financial considerations drive the decisions doctors made for patients—the tests they ordered, the doctors and hospitals they recommended—and it bothered him. Several doctors who were unhappy



Kanin

"Hey, Sisyphus, when you've got a minute I'd like to discuss this progress report with you."

about the direction medicine had taken in McAllen told me the same thing. "It's a machine, my friend," one surgeon explained.

No one teaches you how to think about money in medical school or residency. Yet, from the moment you start practicing, you must think about it. You must consider what is covered for a patient and what is not. You must pay attention to insurance rejections and government-reimbursement rules. You must think about having enough money for the secretary and the nurse and the rent and the malpractice insurance.

Beyond the basics, however, many physicians are remarkably oblivious to the financial implications of their decisions. They see their patients. They make their recommendations. They send out the bills. And, as long as the numbers come out all right at the end of each month, they put the money out of their minds.

Others think of the money as a means of improving what they do. They think about how to use the insurance money to maybe install electronic health records with colleagues, or provide easier phone and e-mail access, or offer expanded hours. They hire an extra nurse to monitor diabetic patients more closely, and to make sure that patients don't miss their mammograms and pap smears and colonoscopies.

Then there are the physicians who

see their practice primarily as a revenue stream. They instruct their secretary to have patients who call with follow-up questions schedule an appointment, because insurers don't pay for phone calls, only office visits. They consider providing Botox injections for cash. They take a Doppler ultrasound course, buy a machine, and start doing their patients' scans themselves, so that the insurance payments go to them rather than to the hospital. They figure out ways to increase their high-margin work and decrease their low-margin work. This is a business, after all.

In every community, you'll find a mixture of these views among physicians, but one or another tends to predominate. McAllen seems simply to be the community at one extreme.

In a few cases, the hospital executive told me, he'd seen the behavior cross over into what seemed like outright fraud. "I've had doctors here come up to me and say, 'You want me to admit patients to your hospital, you're going to have to pay me.'"

"How much?" I asked.

"The amounts—all of them were over a hundred thousand dollars per year," he said. The doctors were specific. The most he was asked for was five hundred thousand dollars per year.

He didn't pay any of them, he said: "I mean, I gotta sleep at night." And he emphasized that these were just a handful of doctors. But he had never been

asked for a kickback before coming to McAllen.

Woody Powell is a Stanford sociologist who studies the economic culture of cities. Recently, he and his research team studied why certain regions—Boston, San Francisco, San Diego—became leaders in biotechnology while others with a similar concentration of scientific and corporate talent—Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York—did not. The answer they found was what Powell describes as the anchor-tenant theory of economic development. Just as an anchor store will define the character of a mall, anchor tenants in biotechnology, whether it's a company like Genentech, in South San Francisco, or a university like M.I.T., in Cambridge, define the character of an economic community. They set the norms. The anchor tenants that set norms encouraging the free flow of ideas and collaboration, even with competitors, produced enduringly successful communities, while those that mainly sought to dominate did not.

Powell suspects that anchor tenants play a similarly powerful community role in other areas of economics, too, and health care may be no exception. I spoke

to a marketing rep for a McAllen home-health agency who told me of a process uncannily similar to what Powell found in biotech. Her job is to persuade doctors to use her agency rather than others. The competition is fierce. I opened the phone book and found seventeen pages of listings for home-health agencies—two hundred and sixty in all. A patient typically brings in between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred dollars, and double that amount for specialized care. She described how, a decade or so ago, a few early agencies began rewarding doctors who ordered home visits with more than trinkets: they provided tickets to professional sporting events, jewelry, and other gifts. That set the tone. Other agencies jumped in. Some began paying doctors a supplemental salary, as “medical directors,” for steering business in their direction. Doctors came to expect a share of the revenue stream.

Agencies that want to compete on quality struggle to remain in business, the rep said. Doctors have asked her for a medical-director salary of four or five thousand dollars a month in return for sending her business. One asked a col-

league of hers for private-school tuition for his child; another wanted sex.

“I explained the rules and regulations and the anti-kickback law, and told them no,” she said of her dealings with such doctors. “Does it hurt my business?” She paused. “I’m O.K. working only with ethical physicians,” she finally said.

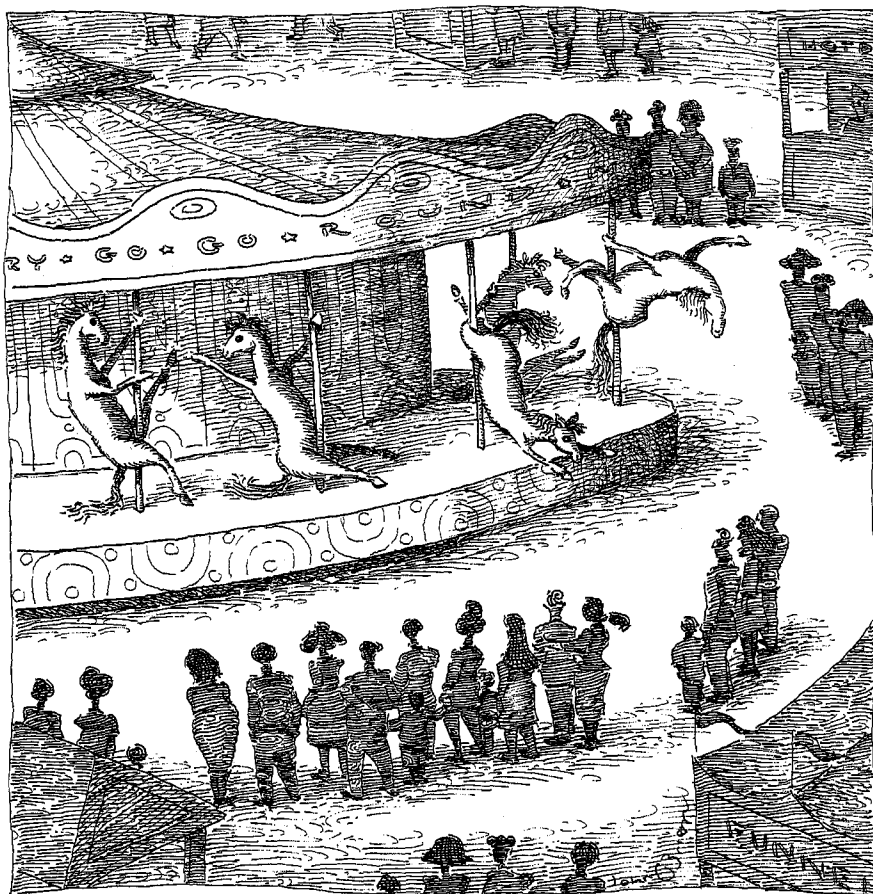
About fifteen years ago, it seems, something began to change in McAllen. A few leaders of local institutions took profit growth to be a legitimate ethic in the practice of medicine. Not all the doctors accepted this. But they failed to discourage those who did. So here, along the banks of the Rio Grande, in the Square Dance Capital of the World, a medical community came to treat patients the way subprime-mortgage lenders treated home buyers: as profit centers.

The real puzzle of American health care, I realized on the airplane home, is not why McAllen is different from El Paso. It’s why El Paso isn’t like McAllen. Every incentive in the system is an invitation to go the way McAllen has gone. Yet, across the country, large numbers of communities have managed to control their health costs rather than ratchet them up.

I talked to Denis Cortese, the C.E.O. of the Mayo Clinic, which is among the highest-quality, lowest-cost health-care systems in the country. A couple of years ago, I spent several days there as a visiting surgeon. Among the things that stand out from that visit was how much time the doctors spent with patients. There was no churn—no shuttling patients in and out of rooms while the doctor bounces from one to the other. I accompanied a colleague while he saw patients. Most of the patients, like those in my clinic, required about twenty minutes. But one patient had colon cancer and a number of other complex issues, including heart disease. The physician spent an hour with her, sorting things out. He phoned a cardiologist with a question.

“I’ll be there,” the cardiologist said.

Fifteen minutes later, he was. They mulled over everything together. The cardiologist adjusted a medication, and said that no further testing was needed. He cleared the patient for surgery, and the operating room gave her a slot the next day.



The whole interaction was astonishing to me. Just having the cardiologist pop down to see the patient with the surgeon would be unimaginable at my hospital. The time required wouldn't pay. The time required just to organize the system wouldn't pay.

The core tenet of the Mayo Clinic is "The needs of the patient come first"—not the convenience of the doctors, not their revenues. The doctors and nurses, and even the janitors, sat in meetings almost weekly, working on ideas to make the service and the care better, not to get more money out of patients. I asked Cortese how the Mayo Clinic made this possible.

"It's not easy," he said. But decades ago Mayo recognized that the first thing it needed to do was eliminate the financial barriers. It pooled all the money the doctors and the hospital system received and began paying everyone a salary, so that the doctors' goal in patient care couldn't be increasing their income. Mayo promoted leaders who focussed first on what was best for patients, and then on how to make this financially possible.

No one there actually intends to do fewer expensive scans and procedures than is done elsewhere in the country. The aim is to raise quality and to help doctors and other staff members work as a team. But, almost by happenstance, the result has been lower costs.

"When doctors put their heads together in a room, when they share expertise, you get more thinking and less testing," Cortese told me.

Skeptics saw the Mayo model as a local phenomenon that wouldn't carry beyond the hay fields of northern Minnesota. But in 1986 the Mayo Clinic opened a campus in Florida, one of our most expensive states for health care, and, in 1987, another one in Arizona. It was difficult to recruit staff members who would accept a salary and the Mayo's collaborative way of practicing. Leaders were working against the dominant medical culture and incentives. The expansion sites took at least a decade to get properly established. But eventually they achieved the same high-quality, low-cost results as Rochester. Indeed, Cortese says that the Florida site has become, in some respects, the most efficient one in the system.

The Mayo Clinic is not an aberration. One of the lowest-cost markets in the country is Grand Junction, Colorado, a

community of a hundred and twenty thousand that nonetheless has achieved some of Medicare's highest quality-of-care scores. Michael Pramenko is a family physician and a local medical leader there. Unlike doctors at the Mayo Clinic, he told me, those in Grand Junction get piecework fees from insurers. But years ago the doctors agreed among themselves to a system that paid them a similar fee whether they saw Medicare, Medicaid, or private-insurance patients, so that there would be little incentive to cherry-pick patients. They also agreed, at the behest of the main health plan in town, an H.M.O., to meet regularly on small peer-review committees to go over their patient charts together. They focussed on rooting out problems like poor prevention practices, unnecessary back operations, and unusual hospital-complication rates. Problems went down. Quality went up. Then, in 2004, the doctors' group and the local H.M.O. jointly created a regional information network—a community-wide electronic-record system that shared office notes, test results, and hospital data for patients across the area. Again, problems went down. Quality went up. And costs ended up lower than just about anywhere else in the United States.

Grand Junction's medical community was not following anyone else's recipe. But, like Mayo, it created what Elliott Fisher, of Dartmouth, calls an accountable-care organization. The leading doctors and the hospital system adopted measures to blunt harmful financial incentives, and they took collective responsibility for improving the sum total of patient care.

This approach has been adopted in other places, too: the Geisinger Health System, in Danville, Pennsylvania; the Marshfield Clinic, in Marshfield, Wisconsin; Intermountain Healthcare, in Salt Lake City; Kaiser Permanente, in Northern California. All of them function on similar principles. All are not-for-profit institutions. And all have produced enviably higher quality and lower costs than the average American town enjoys.

When you look across the spectrum from Grand Junction to McAllen—and the almost threefold difference in the costs of care—you come to realize that we are witnessing

a battle for the soul of American medicine. Somewhere in the United States at this moment, a patient with chest pain, or a tumor, or a cough is seeing a doctor. And the damning question we have to ask is whether the doctor is set up to meet the needs of the patient, first and foremost, or to maximize revenue.

There is no insurance system that will make the two aims match perfectly. But having a system that does so much to misalign them has proved disastrous. As economists have often pointed out, we pay doctors for quantity, not quality. As they point out less often, we also pay them as individuals, rather than as members of a team working together for their patients. Both practices have made for serious problems.

Providing health care is like building a house. The task requires experts, expensive equipment and materials, and a huge amount of coordination. Imagine that, instead of paying a contractor to pull a team together and keep them on track, you paid an electrician for every outlet he recommends, a plumber for every faucet, and a carpenter for every cabinet. Would you be surprised if you got a house with a thousand outlets, faucets, and cabinets, at three times the cost you expected, and the whole thing fell apart a couple of years later? Getting the country's best electrician on the job (he trained at Harvard, somebody tells you) isn't going to solve this problem. Nor will changing the person who writes him the check.

This last point is vital. Activists and policymakers spend an inordinate amount of time arguing about whether the solution to high medical costs is to have government or private insurance companies write the checks. Here's how this whole debate goes. Advocates of a public option say government financing would save the most money by having leaner administrative costs and forcing doctors and hospitals to take lower payments than they get from private insurance. Opponents say doctors would skimp, quit, or game the system, and make us wait in line for our care; they maintain that private insurers are better at policing doctors. No, the skeptics say: all insurance companies do is reject applicants who need health care and stall on paying their bills. Then we have the economists who say that the people who

should pay the doctors are the ones who use them. Have consumers pay with their own dollars, make sure that they have some “skin in the game,” and then they’ll get the care they deserve. These arguments miss the main issue. When it comes to making care better and cheaper, changing who pays the doctor will make no more difference than changing who pays the electrician. The lesson of the high-quality, low-cost communities is that someone has to be accountable for the totality of care. Otherwise, you get a system that has no brakes. You get McAllen.

One afternoon in McAllen, I rode down McColl Road with Lester Dyke, the cardiac surgeon, and we passed a series of office plazas that seemed to be nothing but home-health agencies, imaging centers, and medical-equipment stores.

“Medicine has become a pig trough here,” he muttered.

Dyke is among the few vocal critics of what’s happened in McAllen. “We took a wrong turn when doctors stopped being doctors and became businessmen,” he said.

We began talking about the various proposals being touted in Washington to fix the cost problem. I asked him whether expanding public-insurance programs like Medicare and shrinking the role of insurance companies would do the trick in McAllen.

“I don’t have a problem with it,” he said. “But it won’t make a difference.” In McAllen, government payers already predominate—not many people have jobs with private insurance.

How about doing the opposite and increasing the role of big insurance companies?

“What good would that do?” Dyke asked.

The third class of health-cost proposals, I explained, would push people to use medical savings accounts and hold high-deductible insurance policies: “They’d have more of their own money on the line, and that’d drive them to bargain with you and other surgeons, right?”

He gave me a quizzical look. We tried to imagine the scenario. A cardiologist tells an elderly woman that she needs bypass surgery and has Dr. Dyke see her. They discuss the blockages in her heart, the operation, the risks. And now they’re

supposed to haggle over the price as if he were selling a rug in a souk? “I’ll do three vessels for thirty thousand, but if you take four I’ll throw in an extra night in the I.C.U.”—that sort of thing? Dyke shook his head. “Who comes up with this stuff?” he asked. “Any plan that relies on the sheep to negotiate with the wolves is doomed to failure.”

Instead, McAllen and other cities like it have to be weaned away from their untenably fragmented, quantity-driven systems of health care, step by step. And that will mean rewarding doctors and hospitals if they band together to form Grand Junction-like accountable-care organizations, in which doctors collaborate to increase prevention and the quality of care, while discouraging overtreatment, undertreatment, and sheer profiteering. Under one approach, insurers—whether public or private—would allow clinicians who formed such organizations and met quality goals to keep half the savings they generate. Government could also shift regulatory burdens, and even malpractice liability, from the doctors to the organization. Other, sterner, approaches would penalize those who don’t form these organizations.

This will by necessity be an experiment. We will need to do in-depth research on what makes the best systems successful—the peer-review committees? recruiting more primary-care doctors and nurses? putting doctors on salary?—and disseminate what we learn. Congress has provided vital funding for research that compares the effectiveness of different treatments, and this should help reduce uncertainty about which treatments are best. But we also need to fund research that compares the effectiveness of different systems of care—to reduce our uncertainty about which systems work best for communities. These are empirical, not ideological, questions. And we would do well to form a national institute for health-care delivery, bringing together clinicians, hospitals, insurers, employers, and citizens to assess, regularly, the quality and the cost of our care, review the strategies that produce good results, and make clear recommendations for local systems.

Dramatic improvements and savings will take at least a decade. But a choice must be made. Whom do we

want in charge of managing the full complexity of medical care? We can turn to insurers (whether public or private), which have proved repeatedly that they can’t do it. Or we can turn to the local medical communities, which have proved that they can. But we have to choose someone—because, in much of the country, no one is in charge. And the result is the most wasteful and the least sustainable health-care system in the world.

Something even more worrisome is going on as well. In the war over the culture of medicine—the war over whether our country’s anchor model will be Mayo or McAllen—the Mayo model is losing. In the sharpest economic downturn that our health system has faced in half a century, many people in medicine don’t see why they should do the hard work of organizing themselves in ways that reduce waste and improve quality if it means sacrificing revenue.

In El Paso, the for-profit health-care executive told me, a few leading physicians recently followed McAllen’s lead and opened their own centers for surgery and imaging. When I was in Tulsa a few months ago, a fellow-surgeon explained how he had made up for lost revenue by shifting his operations for well-insured patients to a specialty hospital that he partially owned while keeping his poor and uninsured patients at a nonprofit hospital in town. Even in Grand Junction, Michael Pramenko told me, “some of the doctors are beginning to complain about ‘leaving money on the table.’”

As America struggles to extend health-care coverage while curbing health-care costs, we face a decision that is more important than whether we have a public-insurance option, more important than whether we will have a single-payer system in the long run or a mixture of public and private insurance, as we do now. The decision is whether we are going to reward the leaders who are trying to build a new generation of Mayos and Grand Junctions. If we don’t, McAllen won’t be an outlier. It will be our future. ♦

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MY QUIET TIME

BY ANDY BOROWITZ

Q. What are some things you do to manage your time effectively?

A. I get up at 4:30 every morning. I like the quiet time. It's a time I can recharge my batteries a bit. I exercise and I clear my head and I catch up on the world. I read papers. I look at e-mail. I surf the Web. I watch a little TV, all at the same time. I call it my quiet time but I'm already multitasking. I love listening to music, so I'll do that in the morning, too, when I'm exercising and watching the news.

—An interview with Robert Iger, the C.E.O. of Disney, in the Times.

Whoever said that the early bird gets the worm could have been talking about me, only I'm a person, not a bird, and I'm not interested in getting worms, more like getting things done. But I do get up early. In fact, the secret to my success could be boiled down to three little words: my quiet time. It begins at 1 A.M., when I get out of bed, check my e-mail, brush my teeth, scan some documents, and floss. Then I'll surf the Web, maybe order a sectional couch or trade zloty futures. Last week, I bought a Swiss chalet and sold it at a twenty-per-cent profit while I was still in my pajamas. I wanted to high-five someone, but no one else was awake. Sometimes I can't remember if I've flossed already, so I'll do it again, just to be sure, while checking my e-mail and maybe sending a fax. Did I mention that the early bird gets the worm? That in many ways applies to me.

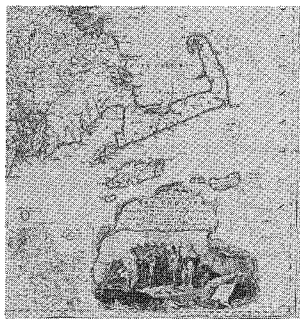
By 1:03, I've had two cups of coffee, I'm down in my basement on the elliptical, and my heart is pounding like a cheetah's. I know that cheetahs have a fast heart rate because I often watch Animal Planet while I'm on the elliptical, although sometimes I'll do the picture-in-picture thing so I can watch CNBC Asia while I'm watching the thing about the cheetahs. It isn't always about cheetahs; it's about other animals, too, like meerkats. I just said cheetahs as a for instance. I do the elliptical naked. One time when I was on the elliptical, I patched myself into a conference call in Jakarta and accidentally hit the camera

thing on my phone, so everyone wound up seeing me in the buff, all flopping around and everything. Another time when I was on the elliptical, I saw an amazing documentary about cheetahs.

While I'm on the elliptical and maybe ordering a hovercraft online, I'll drain a six-pack of Red Bull. Red Bull Red Bull Red Bullbullybully. Then I'll call London. I don't have any business in London, but I have a London phone directory and I like to call people at random. It helps me clear my head. You'd be surprised, though, how some people in London will get totally honked off if you call them out of the blue just to say "What's up?" It's not an anti-American thing; sometimes I'll call them with a fake British accent and say "Tallyho!" and they'll still get pissed. They'll act like it's the middle of the night, even though with the time change and everything it's already 6 A.M. But even if they tell me to go fuck myself it recharges my batteries.

There's no end to the things I can accomplish during my quiet time. I have a fairly nimble contralto voice, and after I pop an amphetamine or two I'll work my way through the Metropolitan Opera repertoire, taking breaks to revise my will or maybe buy a fishing lodge. One thing I like to do is a controlled burn of dry twigs in the woods behind my house. I'll do the elliptical for twenty minutes, set fire to the woods, sing an aria from "The Magic Flute," then jump back on the elliptical. Now, here's something that honks me off: neighbors who call the fire department when you're in the middle of a controlled burn. Those sirens start wailing and, before you know it, there goes my quiet time. I guess the world is divided into two kinds of people: those who understand quiet time and those who don't. By the way, you know who really makes the most of their quiet time? Cheetahs. I saw a documentary on them one time and they are awesome. ♦

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AMERICAN CHRONICLES

IT'S SPREADING

Outbreaks, media scares, and the parrot panic of 1930.

BY JILL LEPORE

On December 14, 1929, during a holiday shopping season darkened by the greatest stock-market crash in American history, Simon S. Martin bought a parrot for his wife, Lillian, at a pet shop on North Eutaw Street, in Baltimore. It was not, as it happened, a well parrot. Hoping to surprise his wife, Martin seems to have asked his daughter, Edith, and her husband, Lee Kalmey, the owner of an auto repair shop, to take care of the bird and bring it over to his house in Annapolis in ten days' time. By Christmas Eve, the parrot must have shown signs of illness: puffy eyes, a drooping head, and feathers as ruffled as if it had flown through a squall. Come Yuletide, the Martins had a dead parrot on their hands.

The pet-shop owner, who may have been wise to the fact that Simon Martin was secretary of the Annapolis Chamber of Commerce, at first offered a replacement, although by New Year's, when Lillian Martin and Edith and Lee Kalmey fell dangerously ill, he was backed-alling, denying that he had ever sold Martin a bird. Meanwhile, the Kalmeyes were getting sicker and sicker, showing symptoms of both pneumonia and typhoid.

On January 6th, a local doctor examined the patients. He had just read a newspaper article about something called parrot fever: it had shown up in Argentina months earlier, when an actor playing a sailor had caught it from his stage parrot. The disease, also called psittacosis, had since spread through South America and Europe. No one seemed to know much about it except that it was deadly. The doctor sent a telegram to the U.S. Public Health Service, in Washington: "CAN YOU PLACE SUPPLY PARROT FEVER SERUM OUR DISPOSAL IMMEDIATELY." Unfortunately, there was no serum, or any known treatment. The mayor alerted the governor. Within forty-eight hours, epidemiologists from the Baltimore City Health Department,

the Maryland Department of Health, the United States Navy and Army, and the Public Health Service, including a team of men from the Hygienic Laboratory in Washington, arrived on the scene. Someone called the newspaper.

"'PARROT' DISEASE Baffles EXPERTS" the *Washington Post* reported in an issue that went to press the night of January 8th, thrilling readers with a medical mystery that would capture the nation's attention with the prospect of a parrot-fever pandemic. Reports, cabled and wired and radioed across land and sea, were printed in the daily paper or broadcast, within minutes, on the radio: tallies, theories, postmortems, more to fear. Before it was over, an admiral in the U.S. Navy ordered sailors at sea to cast their pet parrots into the ocean. One city health commissioner urged everyone who owned a parrot to wring its neck. People abandoned their pet parrots on the streets. Every sneeze seemed a symptom. As the story grew, it took on certain familiar—and, as it turned out, durable—features, features that borrow as much from pulp fiction as from public health: super scientists fight super bugs in race to defeat foreign menace invading American homes, beneath the very Christmas tree.

Epidemics follow patterns because diseases follow patterns. Viruses spread; they reproduce; they die. Epidemiologists study patterns in order to combat infection. Stories about epidemics follow patterns, too. Stories aren't often deadly but they can be virulent: spreading fast, weakening resistance, wreaking havoc. During the recent swine-flu panic, Joe Biden warned Americans not to ride the subway or fly on an airplane, and pharmacies ran out of surgical masks. Why was it so hard to tell, as the story was breaking, if a flu outbreak of pandemic proportions was under way? The world is a far better place for the work epidemiologists do. Maybe, though, we

could do with a few more narratologists.

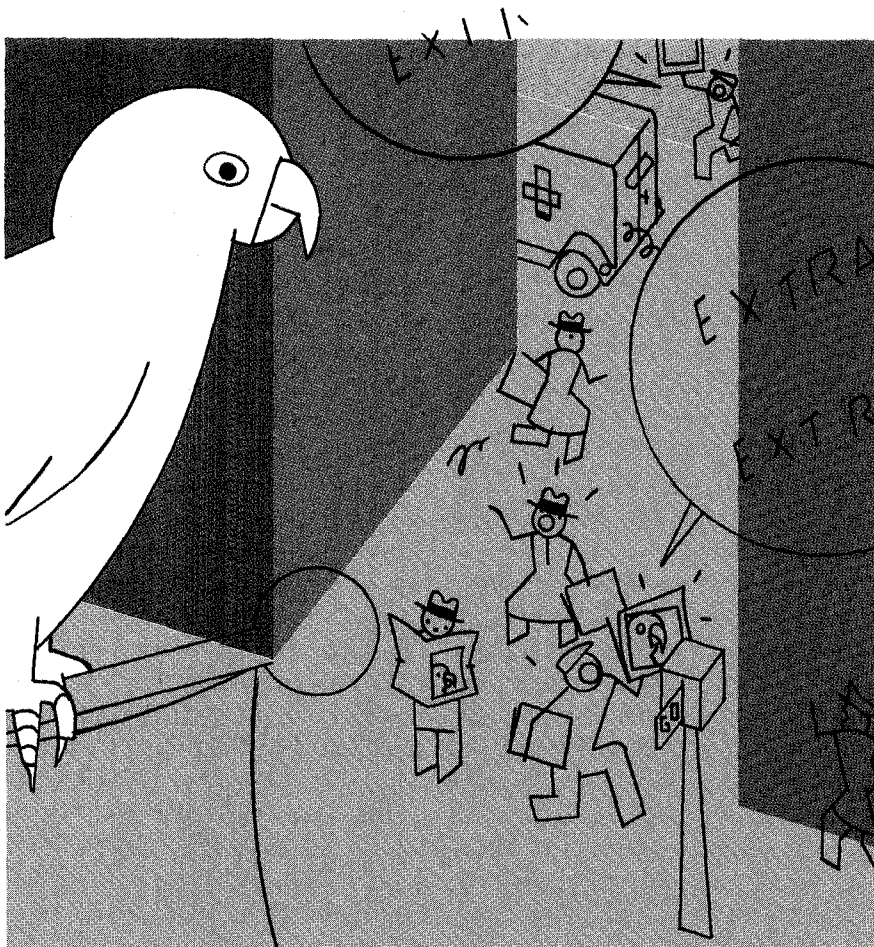
The stories about epidemics that are told in the American press—their plots and tropes—date to the nineteen-twenties, when modern research science, science journalism, and science fiction were born. The germ theory of disease dates to the mid-eighteen-hundreds. Pasteur developed a rabies vaccine in 1885, launching a global battle against infectious illness. By the nineteen-twenties, scientists had developed a vaccine for diphtheria; other vaccines, like the one for polio, would take decades, but hopes ran high. In “The Conquest of Disease” (1927), Thurman B. Rice, a professor of sanitary science, predicted the eradication of sickness itself.

Meanwhile, ordinary people learned to blame germs, not God, for catastrophes like the pandemic of 1918, when at least fifty million people, including nearly seven hundred thousand Americans, died of influenza. Germ theory, which secularized infectious disease, had a side effect: it sacralized epidemiology. The nineteen-twenties witnessed the inauguration of what the historian of medicine Nancy Tomes has called the “epidemic exposé,” the hair-raising account of a disease that threatens to destroy the human race. The genre’s master was a bacteriologist turned journalist named Paul de Kruif. He had taught at the University of Michigan and worked for the U.S. Sanitary Corps, studying the gangrene bacillus. After the war, he turned to writing. In 1925, his collaboration with Sinclair Lewis led to the publication of “Arrowsmith,” a novel about a young doctor fighting bubonic plague—an early medical thriller, for which de Kruif received twenty-five per cent of the royalties. In 1926, de Kruif turned to nonfiction, publishing “Microbe Hunters,” a book of profiles of scientists, starting with Leeuwenhoek, who can see tiny things the rest of us can’t, things that are trying to kill us.

“Microbe Hunters,” which inspired a generation of young readers to pursue careers in science, appeared a month before the first issue of Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*, the first magazine of what is now called science fiction. Many of its stories concern the work of laboratory scientists; the issue of July, 1929, included “The Purple Death,” the story of a young doctor who keeps a copy of “Microbe Hunters” on his desk.

The coming plague was Paul de Kruif’s bread and butter. Three months before Simon Martin bought his wife a parrot for Christmas, de Kruif issued a warning in the lead article of *Ladies’ Home Journal*: “In American milk today there lurks a terrible, wasting fever, that may keep you in bed for a couple of weeks, that may fasten itself on you for one, or for two, or

as confused. Was parrot fever really something to worry about? Reading the newspaper, it was hard to say. “NOT CONTAGIOUS IN MAN,” the *Times* announced. “Highly contagious,” the *Washington Post* said. Who knew? Nobody had ever heard of it before. It lurked in American homes. It came from afar. It was invisible. It might kill you. It made a very good



The media fueled fears of a parrot-fever pandemic; then the story went into reverse.

even for seven years—that might culminate by killing you.” What was this dread malady? Undulant fever. “At least 50,000 people are sick with it at this very moment,” their ailment virtually unknown to “their baffled doctors.” De Kruif’s article, titled “Before You Drink a Glass of Milk,” scared a lot of people and sold a lot of magazines. Boasting of its success, the editor of *Ladies’ Home Journal* explained, “Nobody had ever heard of undulant fever before.”

The experts who descended on Annapolis in early January, 1930, weren’t half as baffled as the *Washington Post* made them out to be, but the reading public must have been at least twice

story. In the late hours of January 8th, editors at the Los Angeles *Times* decided to put it on the front page: “TWO WOMEN AND MAN IN ANNAPOLIS BELIEVED TO HAVE ‘PARROT FEVER.’”

The next day, in Toledo, Mrs. Percy Q. Williams, whose husband had just returned from Cuba with two parrots, died in Mercy Hospital; in Baltimore, Mrs. Louise Schaeffer succumbed to what had at first appeared to be pneumonia. (Women, many of them widows, constituted the majority of the outbreak’s victims. There were suggestions that lonely old women had got the disease by feeding their parrots mouth to mouth. Some called the disease “old maid’s pneumonia.”) Those deaths

would normally have been unremarkable: two older women fading away in the cold of winter. Not this week. On learning that Schaeffer "had been in contact with a parrot several days before she became ill," physicians suspected parrot fever and ordered an autopsy, whereupon the Surgeon General, Dr. Hugh Smith Cumming (a eugenicist best known to history for launching the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, that same year), warned Americans to stay away from recently imported parrots. He insisted that he "did not fear an epidemic," but that, of course, only got people talking about one. Although the results of Schaeffer's autopsy were not yet available, "BALTIMORE WOMAN DIES" made it onto the front page of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on January 11th and "PARROT FEVER KILLS 2 IN THIS COUNTRY" appeared on page 3 of the *Times*. That paper also reported on efforts to trace deadly Argentine parrots that had come to the United States through what were called, as if they were criminals, "two suspected New York dealers."

Some people were worried about more than parrots. On January 11th, after several clerks in the poultry department of a Toledo store started coughing, the city's Health Department launched an investigation into "incipient cases" of psittacosis. Two days later, in a story that appeared on the front page of William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*, the Associated Press announced that the country's scientists had declared war: "The disease-fighting armament of the nation today

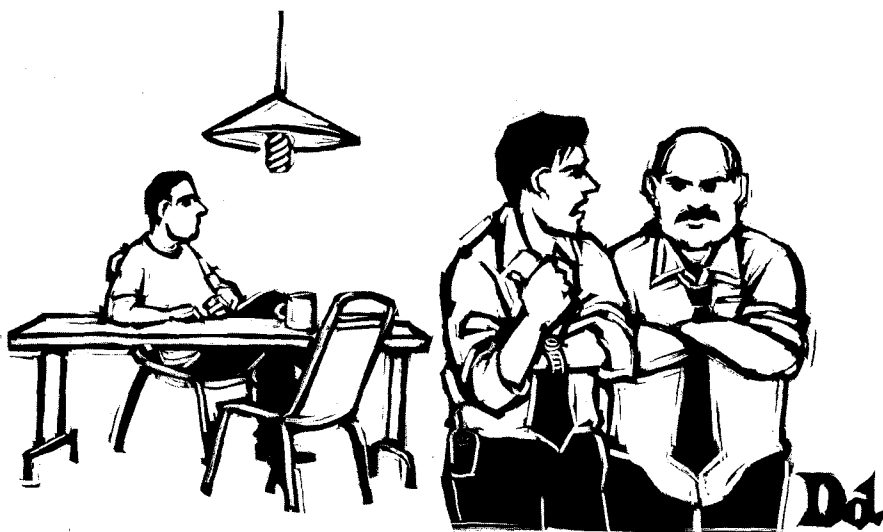
was directed against a new and mysterious enemy." The microbe hunters had taken out their microscopes.

In the years following the First World War, a great many American scientists were looking for sources to fund their vital research. The nation's scientific organizations hired publicity firms. In 1926, a coalition of scientists launched a campaign to raise "A National Fund for the Support of Research in Pure Science." Half the battle, though, had to do with winning over the public, and de Kruif's work made clear that stories were powerful ammunition. Before the First World War, journalists didn't generally report on science, and they certainly didn't profile scientists. After the war, scientists tried writing for newspapers and magazines, attempting to explain the value of their work, but, year by year, the number of scientists writing for a popular audience fell while the number of journalists specializing in science writing rose. Perhaps the era's most effective pro-science publicity machine was the Science Service, a wire service founded in 1920 and edited by a chemist named Edwin E. Slosson. Its purpose was to promote scientific research by feeding stories to newspapers. The service, Slosson said, would not "indulge in propaganda unless it be propaganda to urge the value of research and the usefulness of science." Financed by the newspaper publisher E. W. Scripps, and later by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Research Council, the Science

Service reached a fifth of the American reading public by the mid-nineteen-thirties.

What a microbe hunter needed to do to get funding was to hunt and kill a microbe, preferably a lethal one that nobody had ever heard of before. On January 6, 1930, when that family doctor sent his telegram to the U.S. Public Health Service, the message was sent on to the Hygienic Laboratory, where Dr. Charles Armstrong, a forty-five-year-old pathologist, was charged with heading the investigation. Armstrong wanted to contain the outbreak, urgently; he also wanted to develop a serum, to save the lives of people already infected. Doing so would require experiments; those experiments required infected parrots and infected people. To gather subjects, Armstrong needed to spread the word about psittacosis. What Armstrong needed was a parrot-fever panic.

As Armstrong arrived in Annapolis, a team of public-health officials was sent to that North Eutaw Street pet shop in Baltimore—where four employees were now sick—to track down the purchasers of all the recently imported parrots. Not all those parrots had stayed in town. Mrs. Hugh Lett bought a parrot in Baltimore on December 18th; the bird died on New Year's Eve; Mrs. Lett took sick on January 7th, by which time she was in Cambridge. Armstrong wired messages to public-health officials across the country, asking them to be on the lookout for psittacosis. In city after city, parrot dealers handed over to investigators sick parrots and lists of the people who had bought parrots for Christmas. Dead birds, some of which were exhumed, were shipped to Washington. Cases of suspected psittacosis cropped up in Providence and Chicago, New Haven and Los Angeles. The home of an Ohio family was quarantined after yet another Christmas parrot died. Inevitably, there were cases merely "simulating psittacosis," like the parents of fifteen-year-old Lillian Muller, of the Bronx, who had bought their daughter a parrot, imported from Argentina, at a pet shop in Harlem. The *Times* offered reassurance: "The Mullers' parrot has been eating regularly and has exhibited no signs of drooping." (One constabulary note: the A.P. reported from North Adams, Massachusetts, on January 13th, "A parrot in a local



"Don't we have lighting more intimidating than that energy saver?"

family, whose name was not given out, recently died." Polly?)

By January 15th, the *Times* reported fifty cases nationwide, including eleven in New York City, and seven deaths, including one in Queens and one in Yonkers. Doctors insisted, in vain, that "there was no occasion for general alarm," and "stressed the fact that in none of the cases reported so far in New York has the diagnosis been definitely established as psittacosis." Later that day—after the *Times* went to press with the death count—authorities revealed that blood tests on the New York dead had all come out negative. The *Times*, whose coverage of parrot fever was, all things considered, a model of restraint and clarity, made a point of announcing those negative tests. Elsewhere, though, autopsies and blood cultures that came out negative for psittacosis didn't make it into the papers. By now, Lillian Martin and Edith and Lee Kalmey were fast improving; this was not widely reported, either. People who got better simply fell out of the news.

The nationwide sweep for psittacosis soon supplied Armstrong with enough samples—parrots, healthy, sick, and dead; the blood from infected humans; and even the scrapings from Lillian Martin's birdcage—to begin his work, which he conducted in two basement rooms in the Hygienic Laboratory, aided by his technician, Henry (Shorty) Anderson. "Those parrots were sure mean bastards," Armstrong said. Armstrong and Anderson wore rubber gloves, put trays filled with cresol in the doorways, and covered the birds' cages with disinfectant-soaked curtains. They were not, however, especially fastidious. "The only thing hygienic about the Hygienic Laboratory was its name," one researcher there said. Armstrong explained, "If we'd got too careful, we'd have spent all our time being careful and how could we have found out anything about it?"

This was yet another hallmark of the swashbuckling microbe hunter, who lacked the fussiness of the housewife. "Germ" became a household word in the nineteen-teens. By the twenties, Americans, and especially housewives, lived in fear of germs. Not only did newspapers and magazines run almost daily stories about newly discovered germs like undulant fever but their pages were filled with

advertisements for hygiene products, like Listerine (first sold over the counter in 1914 and, in many ways, the granddaddy of Purell), Lysol (marketed, in 1918, as an anti-flu measure), Kotex ("feminine hygiene," the first menstrual pad, introduced in 1920, a postwar conversion of a surgical dressing developed by Kimberly-Clark), Cellophane (1923), and Kleenex (1924; another Kimberly-Clark product, sold as a towel for removing makeup until a consumer survey revealed that people were using it to blow their noses). Perhaps because kitchens and laboratories have much in common, journalists like de Kruif strove to underscore the manliness of the microbe hunter. Armstrong, de Kruif wrote, "was definitely not the kind of man who would even own a parrot, let alone kiss it."

Armstrong and Anderson and other government scientists worked night and day. On January 13th, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported a landmark success: "PARROT FEVER GERM ISOLATED."

The parrot-fever story made the malady out to be virulent, mysterious, and exotic, despite these facts: the disease was not baffling; it had been identified in the nineteenth century; it was known to infect members of the Psittacidae family, which includes parrots, parakeets, macaws, and cockatoos; in the nineteenth-thirties, the only birds likely to be contagious were those brought to the United States during the last months of 1929; it is possible to catch the disease only from an infected bird (people can't spread it); it infected then, and continues to infect today, between one and two hundred Americans every year. There was a danger, to be sure. Psittacosis is now easily treated with antibiotics like doxycycline, but that wasn't the case in 1930, when one in five people infected with the disease died. Nevertheless, the only people who had much to worry about were people who had been in quite close contact with certain tropical birds very recently imported from South America.

Psittacosis incited, if briefly, a sizable panic among people who, by any reasonable measure, had nothing to fear. That was dangerous. Even as the story unfolded, what to make of parrot fever and just how much responsibility the press or the scientific community bore for the panic proved matters of dispute. But what

happened next seems nearly as dangerous as the panic itself: people suddenly started insisting that parrot fever didn't exist.

"U.S. ALARM OVER PARROT DISEASE NOT WARRANTED," the *Chicago Daily Tribune* declared, on January 15th. Less than two weeks into the story, parrot fever looked, suddenly, silly. Parrot fever became a national joke. A Washington correspondent for the *Times* filed a story about a parrot owned by Secretary of State Henry Stimson. The parrot, named the Old Soak, had been locked in the basement of the Pan-American Building, "not because he has psittacosis" but because he had a habit of swearing. The *Wall Street Journal* ran this joke: what did the janitor say when the professor at the Polytechnic Institute asked him why he was cleaning the lab with carbolic acid? "So none of de Poly students gets dis new parrot fever." Even the straight stories weren't taken seriously. "A parrot foundling made its appearance early yesterday morning when a green bird with a chipped beak was discovered in the vestibule of John Schreyer's home, 25-27 Humphreys Street, East Elmhurst, Queens," the *Times* reported, whereupon jailbirds at Sing Sing offered asylum for all unwanted parrots; the warden said, "The inmates here think this talk about parrot fever is nonsense."

A pro-parrot lobby formed. On January 17th, six of the country's leading importers of winged pets, including the Odenwald Bird Company, the Imperial Pet Shop, and the Dahle Bird Company of Philadelphia, gathered at the Hotel Commodore in New York, where they founded the Bird Dealers' Association of America. Prussia and Bavaria, suffering from their own outbreaks, had already instituted parrot embargoes. The bird business was in a bad way. The Bird Dealers fought back by claiming that the disease did not exist, had never existed in human beings, "and that the scare over 'parrot fever' had been chiefly brought about by the active imagination of a Baltimore newspaper man."

Exaggeration breeds exaggeration. The counter-story spread as wildly as the story had. And the Bird Dealers had a point about the imagination of newspapermen. The first American doctor to believe he had seen psittacosis had read about it in the newspaper. The Martins' doctor probably read Hearst's Baltimore

American. Every Sunday, Hearst produced for his papers a supplement called the *American Weekly*. Edited by Morrill Goddard, the *American Weekly* was something between *Parade* and the *National Enquirer*. Goddard knew how to sell a plague and knew, too, that selling plagues was good for his advertising accounts with hygiene-product manufacturers. In March, 1930, Goddard was interviewed by the staff of the J. Walter Thompson Company, one of the nation's most influential advertising agencies. "There is a lot of interest now in parrot fever," the interviewer observed, asking, "How far will the research on parrot fever have to go before you print something about it?" Goddard took umbrage at the suggestion that he had not already covered parrot fever—that he had not, in fact, *scooped* parrot fever. "We were the first newspaper to present it to the American public," he claimed, not quite accurately, "to warn them that parrots might be deadly in the home." As to how he had come by the story, Goddard explained that he spent his evenings reading obscure scientific journals, where he read about the outbreak in Buenos Aires:

I sent down to our man there and he sent me a wretched story without details and I cabled him and he sent me a second story with further details and pictures and that story was printed about four or five weeks before the first case developed in New York. It gave all the details of what is known as "psittacosis." Now, it is a matter of dispute whether it is a germ or a virus but it is a matter of no consequence as far as making a feature out of it.

Goddard had no real interest in the science. He wanted to run a story about a danger lurking in American homes: "The fact that the parrot in the cage at your house may put you in the cemetery is enough for me."

On January 16th, just over one week after the Washington *Post* printed its first parrot-fever piece, the *Times* ran a story radioed in by a correspondent in Austria: a Viennese scientist believed that Americans were suffering from "mass suggestion." Dr. Julius Bauer said, "Psittacosis has been known to science since 1892. Now for some reason it has assumed in the public mind the dimensions of a plague." The next day, the Science Service, reporting on an article in the *Journal of the American Medical*

Association, reminded Americans that "the possibility of unusual disorders must be ever present in the medical mind." Who knew what might infect us next? Parrot fever ought to serve as proof that "it is no longer possible for any person or any nation to live in isolation." The world, in short, was a dangerous place.

Or was it just a gullible one? "Every winter, America has to have a new malady, and this year it is Parrot Fever," a columnist for the *Post* wrote. "People are getting all worked up over this new 'parrot-fever,'" a writer for *Life* scoffed, "but Lord! it's been endemic at the Capitol since Polly was an egg." E. B. White figured that the country was suffering from nothing so much as a bad case of the heebie-jeebies, brought on by extended exposure to newspapers that were forever issuing warnings about sharks infesting the beaches of New Jersey, anthrax spores contaminating unsterilized shaving brushes, and noxious gases escaping from iceboxes in the middle of the night. In an issue that went to press on January 20th, *The New Yorker's* Talk of the Town included a piece by White calling parrot fever merely "the latest and most amusing example of the national hypochondria":

There have been hundreds of national menaces, keeping us all on tenterhooks, keeping the populace feeling the national pulse and applying the national stethoscope. Psittacosis is one of the best, because one of the most picturesque. What will probably happen will be that some reporter will invent a disease traceable to something that happens to everybody: "Otis heart" from riding in elevators, maybe, or "corn-flakes itch" from eating breakfast food, and we'll all die of autosuggestion.

That hasn't happened quite yet, but we still can't tell whether we are all about to die or whether we are being sold a bill of goods. This condition is chronic.

On January 22, 1930, the *Post* reported that Lillian Martin and Edith and Lee Kalmey had recovered. Herbert Hoover prepared to sign an executive order banning the importation of parrots. The story seemed more or less wrapped up. But then, terribly, scientists starting dying. On January 23rd, Dr. Daniel S. Hatfield, the chief of the bureau of communicable diseases of the Baltimore City Health Department, succumbed to psittacosis. Hat-

field's colleague Dr. William Stokes died on February 10th. Shorty Anderson died on February 8th. That same day, Charles Armstrong was admitted to the U.S. Naval Hospital with a fever of 104 degrees.

The director of the Hygienic Laboratory, George McCoy, insisted on taking over Armstrong's work himself. He took blood from a patient who had recovered from psittacosis and injected it into Armstrong's veins. Armstrong improved, and eventually recovered. Afterward, he wrote up his report, according to which there had been a total of a hundred and sixty-nine cases of psittacosis nationwide, and thirty-three fatalities. In his report, Armstrong credited the press, without which, he believed, "this outbreak would largely have escaped detection." Armstrong's work earned him a place in de Kruif's 1932 sequel to "Microbe Hunters," a book titled "Men Against Death."

In February and early March of 1930, while Armstrong was still recovering, nine other people at the Hygienic Laboratory became sick. Psittacosis seemed to have contaminated the whole building. On March 15th, McCoy ordered the building evacuated. Alone, he walked down the stairs to Armstrong's basement laboratory. He killed, with chloroform, every parrot, mouse, pigeon, guinea pig, rat, and monkey that had been used in the psittacosis experiments. "He murdered and murdered and made a slick and clean job of it," de Kruif wrote. He burned the bodies in the building's incinerator. He sealed all the windows. The fumigation squad arrived at 2 P.M. and began spraying the building with cyanide. Sparrows flying fifty feet over the building froze, mid-flight, and fell to earth. The next day, the headline in the *Post* read, "PARROT FEVER PANIC SEIZES LABORATORY." Two months later, on May 26, 1930, Congress rewarded the Hygienic Laboratory by expanding it and granting it a new name: the National Institute of Health. ♦

DEPARTMENT OF SELF-AWARENESS

From the Portola (Calif.) Reporter.

In Quincy, a caller requested to be taken to jail. He said that he was "drunk and being an ass." He said that he was being verbally abusive and couldn't stop. No arrest was reported.

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SLIM'S TIME

Who is Carlos Slim, and does he want the paper of record?

BY LAWRENCE WRIGHT

When the credit window suddenly slammed shut last fall, the New York Times Company found itself with a four-hundred-million-dollar line of financing scheduled to expire in May, and no obvious way to raise the money. Advertising revenue at the *Times* was tumbling, as it was at every American newspaper, and the company was servicing \$1.1 billion in debt, which was more than the business was worth. Standard & Poor's had reduced the company's credit rating to below investment-grade status, making it difficult for the paper to secure new financing. While *Times* reporters were chronicling the implosion of some of the country's most significant brokerages, banks, mortgage lenders, and insurance companies, their own institution seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

In October, 2008, Chris Wood, a representative of SunTrust, an Atlanta bank that had loaned about eighty million dollars to the *Times*, approached Inbursa, a bank in Mexico City that belongs to Carlos Slim Helú, a Mexican businessman who is sometimes ranked as the richest man in the world. A month earlier, Slim had taken a substantial position in the Times Company. Wood asked Slim if he would lend the company two hundred million dollars. Discussions went on until Thanksgiving, when an informal agreement was reached. The terms were onerous: the loan was for six years, at an interest rate of fourteen per cent—essentially, the going rate for a junk bond—and it came with limitations on incurring further debt. But the negotiations hadn't focussed on the interest rate; instead, they had centered on Slim's demand for millions of dollars in stock-purchase warrants, which could dramatically increase his ownership stake in the company. The Times Company agreed to award Slim warrants on 15.9 million shares if he raised the loan amount to two hundred and fifty million dollars. The deal was finally signed in January. Slim became the company's largest

creditor and was poised to become one of its largest stockholders—after members of the Ochs-Sulzberger clan, which has controlled the *Times* since 1896.

A *Times* correspondent who covered Mexico for the paper was stunned when he heard that the company had been bailed out by a man he considered an exemplar of Mexico's crony capitalism. "Slim is the consummate monopolist," the reporter said. "Does being embroiled in a business culture of back-scratching and unseen forces make him a great partner for the *Times*? I don't think so."

In modern history, no one has dominated a major economy as overwhelmingly as Carlos Slim does that of Mexico—a country of a hundred and ten million citizens, in which the per-capita income is little more than ten thousand dollars. In August, 2007, Eduardo Porter, a member of the *Times* editorial board, wrote on the Op-Ed page, "Growing up in Mexico City, I always knew Mexico was an unjust country—a place where small coteries of the privileged control all power and wealth while half the population lives in poverty. But it never occurred to me that Mexico would have billionaires." Porter was referring to a report in *Forbes* that listed, among the world's nine hundred and forty-six billionaires, ten Mexicans, including Slim, and to an article in *Fortune* that named him the world's richest man, worth, at the time, fifty-nine billion dollars—equivalent to five per cent of Mexico's total annual production of goods and services. Comparing Slim to the robber barons of America's Gilded Age, Porter observed, "It takes about nine of the captains of industry and finance of the 19th and early 20th centuries"—he listed John D. Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John J. Astor, Andrew Carnegie, Alexander Stewart, Frederick Weyerhaeuser, Jay Gould, and Marshall Field—"to replicate the footprint that Mr. Slim has left on Mexico."

Slim and his heirs control more than

two hundred companies; those which are publicly traded in Mexico account for about forty per cent of the country's main stock-market index. Nearly every day, nearly every Mexican contributes something to the Slim cash box. Slim is also one of Mexico's largest private employers. He owns Sanborns, which is both the major retail outlet in the country and its largest restaurant chain. His portfolio contains Inbursa, one of Mexico's most prominent banks; Volaris, an airline; a mining company; the Mexican branch of Sears; construction and insurance companies; a financial group; five hotels; a bottling company; a cigarette manufacturer; and much valuable real estate. Any of these enterprises would have made Carlos Slim a wealthy man, but the foundation of his empire is the telecommunications company Telmex, which he acquired in 1990, when Mexico began privatizing its national industries. Ten years later, Slim spun off a cell-phone business, América Móvil, which is now the third-largest company in Latin America.

"When Carlos Slim started climbing on the *Forbes* list, I began doing my own math," Eduardo García, a publisher in Mexico City, told me. In 2005, when *Forbes* ranked Slim as the world's fourth-richest man, García—who writes a column called "Slim Watch" in *Sentido Común*, an online magazine he edits—was able to find ten billion dollars more in assets than *Forbes* had reported. In March, 2007, García declared that Slim had moved into first place, ahead of Bill Gates by a billion dollars. Reuters ran a news item about Slim being the world's richest man, and the *Wall Street Journal* covered the story. (According to *Forbes*, Slim is now third, behind Gates and Warren Buffett, as the worth of all three men has diminished. *Forbes* calculates that Slim is currently worth thirty-five billion dollars, five billion less than Gates.)

To many Mexicans, Slim's wealth is a matter of pride. In a recent poll, Slim,

BARRY BUTT



In modern history, no one has dominated a major economy as overwhelmingly as Carlos Slim does that of Mexico.

who shuns politics, was designated “the great leader Mexico needs,” clobbering the most popular prospective candidate for President, Enrique Peña Nieto, the governor of the State of Mexico. But to many other Mexicans Slim represents what is wrong with the Mexican system. A prominent investment banker in Mexico City told me, “There are two views in the country about Slim. The view I hold is that he has taken advantage of our system, but he is also a brilliant businessman. He runs his companies very well, with very little excess. The other view is that he’s a bully, and he’s done enormous damage to Mexico.”

The publisher of one of Mexico’s leading newspapers told me, “The rules are, the strongest man wins. We don’t have a single case where we have a businessman in jail for price fixing or monopoly practices. It’s difficult to defend the proposition that someone who could be the world’s richest man comes from what should be a highly regulated sector of a very poor country.”

I met with Slim recently in his Mexico City office. On being confronted with the observations of his critics, he scarcely looked up from a pile of balance sheets that he was poring over. His hair is the color of wire, and he has a squared-off mustache. As we talked, his eyes were narrow and wary, reflecting a long-standing caution about talking to the press—or perhaps they were simply weary from the strain of reading column after column of numbers. It was getting late; we had been sitting together for hours, and his face was glazed with perspiration. “If society were to tell me to get out of business, I would do it, but please ask my critics what they have done for the country,” Slim said. “How many jobs have *they* created?” he added. “Oh, how they hate me!”

Although Carlos Slim has often been described as a merciless predator, he has never been caught in one of the personal scandals that periodically spill onto the front pages of Mexican newspapers. And, given his fortune, he is not a lavish spender. “He is the only Mexican among the top two hundred in wealth who doesn’t have a home in the U.S.,” a former Mexican government official told me. For the past thirty-seven years, Slim has lived in an unpre-

tentious house in the capital’s Lomas de Chapultepec neighborhood. (He is a widower; his wife, Soumaya, died in 1999. They had six children, all of whom now work for their father.) He showed me his home office—a small room containing a desk, an Aeron chair, and bookshelves filled with histories and biographies—and his bedroom, which was the size of a Manhattan hotel room. The only extravagance in the house was the art: Murillo’s “Inmaculada Concepción” in the living room, an El Greco in the dining room.

Politically, Slim is difficult to categorize. He professes to be indifferent to the politics of those he works with. In the nineties, his reputation was tainted by his association with Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the now disgraced former President. Salinas once invited Slim and two dozen other wealthy Mexican businessmen to dinner, and solicited twenty-five million dollars from each of them. Slim told me that the donations were intended to help Salinas set up a fund for independent financing of elections; in any case, it looked like a squalid backroom deal. These days, Slim told me, “I don’t have business with any politicians.”

Slim is a man of few pastimes, apart from baseball, which attracts him because of his passion for statistics. His favorite team is the New York Yankees. He can recall obscure statistics, such as Sandy Koufax’s minimum number of strikeouts per inning or the batting averages of the stars of the Negro leagues. Occasionally, he publishes rhapsodic articles about the sport. “The numbers speak on a limitless diamond: of memory, imagination, the making of legends,” he wrote in 1999. “The love of the game has a new beginning; the mind is once again at play.”

Slim’s nationalism, his humility, and his relatively modest personal habits stand as a kind of rebuke to the image that Mexicans typically have of their oligarchs. An acquaintance of Slim’s recalled that, whenever Slim came to an economics lecture or a party for a foreign political figure, he would pull out a black notebook and make notes, in tiny script. “Nobody else did that,” the man said. With Microsoft, Telmex owns Prodigy MSN, an Internet service provider, yet Slim doesn’t have a computer and says that he doesn’t know how to

use one. (He does carry a BlackBerry, though, which he loves, calling it “my B.B.”) Despite his extensive art collection—in 1994, he established the Museo Soumaya, named after his wife—Slim is thought of as something of a parvenu. One reporter remembers interviewing Slim in his office, where he was surrounded by Impressionist paintings with the Sotheby’s lot numbers still pasted on the frames. Sergio Sarmiento, a television talk-show host and a newspaper columnist, said of him, “He’s a loner. He doesn’t have much of a social life. When we have lunch, he wears suits off the rack from Sears—he owns it. The food comes from Sanborns—he owns it. He doesn’t attend fashion events. He’s a lousy speaker, shy, and he doesn’t have a good sense of humor. He likes to watch sports.” Another newspaper publisher told me, “I had dinner with him one night, and he had a hole in his shirtsleeve that you could put your fist through.”

Slim’s father, who was originally named Khalil Slim, arrived in the port of Veracruz in 1902, at the age of fourteen, having travelled by himself from the Lebanese village of Jezzine. In Mexico, there are now hundreds of thousands of descendants of Arab immigrants, especially Lebanese. The immigrants came seeking religious freedom—the Slims were Maronite Christians—or fleeing the draft of the Ottoman Empire. Khalil, who changed his name to Julián, joined his two older brothers, who had established a retail business.

In what now appears to be a characteristic Slim move, Julián and his brother José opened a general store in Mexico City in 1911—as the Mexican Revolution was getting under way. Three years later, Julián, at the age of twenty-six, bought out his brother’s share in the store, called the Oriental Star.

At one point when I was visiting Slim’s office, he punched a number on the speakerphone on the dining table that serves as his desk.

“*Si, Ingeniero?*” a voice said.

Slim called for the ledger books from his father’s store. “He decided he would always be in Mexico,” Slim explained. “He invested during the revolution.” A few moments later, one of his nephews came in with the ledgers, and he showed me a page, written in Julián’s elegant

hand, from November 3, 1919; by that date, nearly two million people had died or fled the country, but Julián had accumulated more than half a million pesos' worth of merchandise, stock, and real estate. Julián sold the store in August, 1929, two months before the Wall Street crash plunged the world into the Great Depression.

Carlos Slim was born on January 28, 1940, the fifth of six children of Julián and his wife, Linda Helú, whose parents were Lebanese immigrants. Carlos opened a checking account when he was only ten years old, and quickly realized that he wasn't getting a big enough return on his deposit. He withdrew the money and began buying savings bonds, for ten pesos. The bonds were supposed to double in value in ten years. "I thought that was ten-per-cent interest, but I found it was 7.17," he remembered. "I discovered compound interest."

In 1952, when Carlos was twelve, his father gave each of the children a savings book, and began going over their personal income and expenses every week. He stressed the value of strong families. He used toothpicks to show that "you can break one, but you cannot break all of them together," Slim recalled. A maxim that Julián liked to repeat was: "Money that leaves the business evaporates." This became a credo of Slim's future empire. Another was: "All times are good if you work in the right way." Slim said he learned from his father that "you are only a temporary manager of wealth. At the end of the day, you go with nothing."

Julián Slim may have felt a particular urgency in imparting these lessons to his children. He was a diabetic, and had already survived one heart attack; in 1953, at the age of sixty-five, he had a second heart attack and died. Slim was devastated. "I stayed in my home for two years," he recalled. He stopped going to movies and parties.

"I was a tough kid," he said, in his office. His thoughts drifted; he reached across the table and picked up a pair of clippers, which he often fiddled with as we were talking, and began to trim his nails. "You get angry because of what happened." On another occasion, he told me, "Any personal crisis—you have to use it to get stronger."

Slim began emerging from his de-

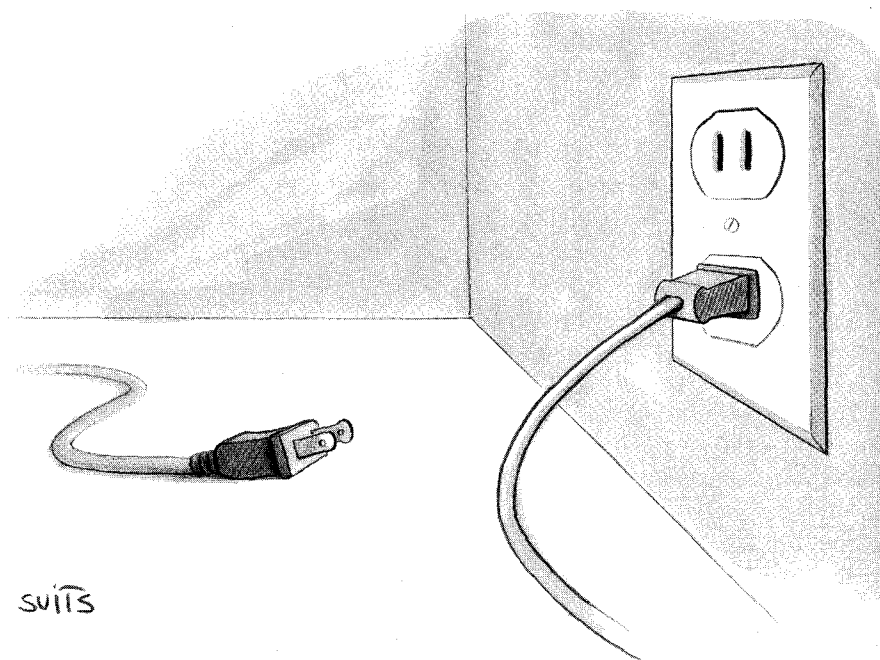
pression when he entered high school, in 1955. He was a good student—he showed me the framed diploma from the Catholic school he attended, which noted that he was at the top of his class—and he continued making investments, even dipping into the school fees that his mother provided. In January, 1955, his balance sheet showed a net worth of fifty-five hundred pesos; by August of 1957, it had grown to nearly thirty-two thousand. He attended his first board meeting—of a mining company that he was interested in—when he was still a teen-ager.

"There are people who are good for letters and others that are good for numbers," Slim observed. He decided to become an engineer. He entered the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and performed so well that he was asked to teach his fellow-students linear programming, which is often used to calculate the optimum allocation of resources—a Slim specialty. (He eventually published a thesis on the subject.) He also formed a student investment club, requiring each member to put up a few hundred pesos. He was a handsome young man, friendly and popular, but photographs from that era capture a striking gravity in his expression.

Slim completed his studies in 1961 and went to work for a prominent firm in Mexico City. Although he is still

known to his employees and his friends as *El Ingeniero*—the Engineer—he realized that his ambitions lay elsewhere, and he abandoned engineering. Before the next chapter began, he decided to take a year off. It was 1964, and he headed to New York.

Most newspapers in America, like telephone companies in Mexico, operate as semi-monopolies, or what Warren Buffett has labelled "economic franchises"—they offer necessary products or services that are not subject to price regulation and are thought by their customers to have no substitute. Until the nineteen-seventies, nearly every major city had competitive daily newspapers, but consolidation—caused, in part, by the popularity of television news—tended to leave only one paper in each market. Most of the surviving papers were left in an enviable situation. In what may prove to be a historical anomaly, daily journalism suddenly became a lucrative enterprise. Newspapers began buying prime downtown lots and building glassy office towers. Reporters were paid a reasonable wage, which was also unprecedented. But, even before the current recession struck, the basic sales model for print media began falling apart: Craigslist destroyed the classified-advertising base, department stores consolidated and advertised





"We need to talk—let's have conversation No. 52A."

less, and the Internet made the free distribution of news the norm.

And so when Slim began investing in the *Times* last year many smart people were dubious. "We were saying, 'This guy is crazy,'" an adviser to the Times Company board told me. The stock subsequently slid from fifteen dollars to six; Slim lost millions. The stock-purchase warrants that came with the loan, however, placed him in an advantageous position with the *Times*. He could become one of the main stockholders, in addition to being the company's leading creditor. It would be difficult for anyone to take over the paper without his involvement, and if the *Times* went bankrupt he would

presumably be entitled to a substantial portion of the company's available assets.

"The smartest thing the paper did was to turn itself into a true national newspaper, with the very best Web site," a *Times* writer told me recently over dinner. "The dumbest thing for the company was to buy back its own stock when it was in the thirties and forties." That was during the early two thousands. The night we talked, one share of Times Company stock was worth less than the price of the Sunday paper. "Investment bankers probably talked the company into it," the writer said. "Management spent, like, a billion dollars." (In fact, the figure is \$1.4 billion.) "That's capital they really wish they

had now. Then, of course, they bought the Boston *Globe*."

In 1993, the Times Company, whose chairman at the time was Arthur Sulzberger, Sr. (the father of the current publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr.), paid \$1.1 billion for the *Globe*, the highest price ever for an American newspaper. In 2006, Jack Welch, the former head of General Electric, and two partners expressed interest in buying the *Globe*, reportedly for six hundred million dollars. The *Times* sent Welch a letter saying that the *Globe* was not for sale. Welch's proposed price was more than half the current market value of the entire Times Company, which includes the radio station WQXR, the search engine About.com, a minority stake in the company that owns the Boston Red Sox, and sixteen newspapers, not counting the *Globe* and the *Times*. The Boston daily is now losing more than fifty million dollars a year, and the *Times* has threatened to shut it down. "That is really very disturbing," the writer, who has known Sulzberger, Jr., for several years, said. "It is astounding that the *Times* would do that."

It's not clear if Slim wants to control the *Times*, and, if so, why. "Why would anybody want it?" the writer said. "You want it because you can change it ideologically, or you want to have the same pride that the Sulzbergers have in owning the New York *Times*. It has a value that transcends economic value." The writer went on, "If this was Rupert Murdoch or Sumner Redstone or Michael Eisner or David Geffen, you would say, 'Oh, I get this.' But this is Carlos, and he's totally about the economics." The writer admitted to being baffled about Slim's motivation. "That's the great mystery of this play," he said.

To protect the Ochs-Sulzberger clan's control over the newspaper, Times Company stock is divided into two tiers: Class A, which can be bought on the open market; and Class B, held largely by the Ochs-Sulzberger family. Owners of Class B stock elect seventy per cent of the board, thereby determining the policies of the paper. I asked the writer if the family, which holds eighty-nine per cent of the Class B shares of Times Company stock, would ever be tempted to sell, as the Bancroft family eventually did, when Murdoch came shopping for

Dow Jones and the *Wall Street Journal*.

"A lot of people have looked for cracks inside that family, and nobody has ever found them," the writer said. "But the stock is now way down, and the company suspended the dividend, and dividends are how the Sulzbergers who don't work put money in their pockets."

Even if there were dissidents in the family who wanted to sell the paper, they would face a formidable challenge. The family trust is overseen by eight members, and the assent of six of them would be required to approve structural changes to the company, including its sale. That hasn't kept away suitors, many of whom have criticized what they perceive as poor business decisions on the part of the *Times* management. In 2007, Hassan Elmasry, a Morgan Stanley fund manager based in London, who controlled ten million shares of Class A *Times* Company stock, pressured the management to eliminate the two-tier stock system, without success. The hedge fund Harbinger Capital Partners forced two candidates onto the board after acquiring nearly twenty per cent of the company's stock, but that hasn't got Harbinger any closer to running the paper.

The most serious bid for the *Times*—one that might have solved its financial problems—came from David Geffen, the entertainment mogul. In September, when Slim was making his initial investment in the company, Geffen called Steven Rattner, a close friend of Arthur, Jr.'s and a former *Times* reporter. (Rattner is now managing the automobile bailout for the Obama Administration.) According to sources close to both men, Geffen offered to buy out the *Times* and take it private. Knowing that the Sulzbergers would resist his proposal, Geffen suggested that he would leave the editorial side to Sulzberger while he took over management of the business, eventually placing the paper in the hands of a nonprofit foundation. Rattner presented the idea to Sulzberger, who rejected it. Then, when Geffen learned of the pending loan from Carlos Slim, he called both Rattner and Sulzberger and offered to make the same deal. Sulzberger turned Geffen down, saying that he preferred Slim, because he already held a large stake in the paper. He was reportedly also worried

about Geffen's ambition to take over the company. In May, Citibank approached Geffen and asked if he wanted to buy Harbinger's stake in the *Times*, which would make him the largest shareholder after the Sulzberger family. Geffen said that he would pay market price for the stock, but Harbinger reportedly wanted a steep premium. Geffen declined.

Until recently, the *Times* had resisted making the sort of staff cuts that have decimated newsrooms all over America. But in April *Times* employees were informed of a five-per-cent pay cut. Soon afterward, a hundred employees were fired from the business side. "There's a growing sense that the company is really hitting a wall and management doesn't know how to deal with it," the writer said to me in mid-May. "For the first time, people really are thinking this place could go bankrupt."

Carlos Slim was twenty-four years old when he arrived in New York, in the summer of 1964. He visited the World's Fair, where he particularly enjoyed General Electric's Progressland, which had a rotating auditorium. At Futurama, the General Motors exhibit, moving chairs took fairgoers into the year 2024, when the moon would be a tourist destination. During his month-long trip, Slim also visited the New York Public Library and the Statue of Liberty, and he went again and again to the New York Stock Exchange, burying himself in its library. "I wanted to see how it works," he says.

Slim returned to Mexico in August, and while he was home he met the sixteen-year-old daughter of one of his mother's friends. The girl, Soumaya Domit Gemayel, was the child of two prominent Lebanese-immigrant families, and she was cultured, slender, and elegant. "I was very impressed," Slim recalled.

Then he was off again, to France, Germany, and Spain. He visited Jez-zine, his father's village in Lebanon,

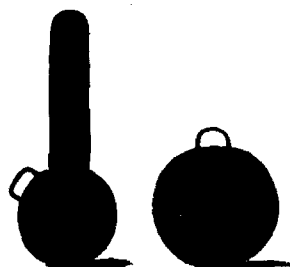
known for its beautiful waterfalls. He toured the ruins in Baalbeck and Byblos, and he enjoyed going to casinos. But at the same time he was preparing his next move—a kind of surprise attack on several key sectors of the Mexican economy.

In 1965, Slim says, "I went from being an investor to being mainly an operator." He had read some popular literature on business, in particular "How to Be Rich"—a collection of the advice columns that J. Paul Getty, then the wealthiest man in the U.S., had written for *Playboy*. Getty urged his readers to cultivate a "millionaire mentality," which he described as being "always and above all cost-conscious and profit-minded." Getty made his fortune as a wildcatter in oil fields, earning his first million at the age of twenty-four. Slim was already a year older, but by the end of 1965 he had established a brokerage house, acquired a bottling company, and incorporated a real-estate business, Inmobiliaria Carso. The word "Carso" comes from the first letters of his name and that of Soumaya, whom he wed in April of 1966.

When Slim married, his mother offered to buy him a house—a family custom. Slim said that he would prefer the cash equivalent. Upon receiving a million pesos from his mother, he built a twelve-story condominium in Mexico City. He and Soumaya occupied the ninth floor and rented out the other apartments.

Slim continued acquiring businesses—a copper mine and a printing company among them—but his most significant purchase was the cigarette manufacturer Cigatam, which at the time had the Mexican license for Marlboros. Cigatam provided Slim with a critical ingredient for amassing a fortune: steady cash flow.

By 1981, Slim had begun to see signs of economic catastrophe. Before a crisis, he observed, there is "an excess of excess." Mexico, a major oil producer, was deeply in debt but swimming in petrodollars. Inflation was out of control all over the world. Oil prices were falling, and capital fled the country. In February, 1982, Mexico devalued the peso, causing it to lose more than seventy per cent of its value; in August, the Secretary of Finance and Public Credit announced that the country was defaulting on its foreign



debts. It was bankrupt. Investors wanted nothing to do with Mexico. Slim went shopping.

In 1982, he bought shares in Reynolds Aluminum, General Tire, and the iconic Sanborns retail chain, which had once been his father's major competitor. Sanborns now has a hundred and twenty-five stores around the country. The typical Sanborns is considerably smaller than a Wal-Mart, but still manages to sell clothing, jewelry, electronics, pens, cards, toiletries, books, magazines, DVDs, and toys, and has a restaurant, a bar, a bakery, and a pharmacy. There is also a separate chain of Sanborns cafés.

"The year 1983 was crazy," Slim recalls. "People wanted to sell not only their investments . . . but also their companies." American businesses began pulling out of Mexico and dumping their Mexican subsidiaries. Slim says that he began investing in Anderson Clayton, which sold cotton gins, at fifty-eight pesos a share. A few months later, it paid a sixty-five-peso dividend. Other companies were being sold for one or two per cent of their book value. "We bought a paper company for a million and a half dollars." He recalls picking up forty-three per cent of a Firestone subsidiary for a hundred and forty thousand dollars. "These were the best times ever," he says. "Nobody wanted to buy anything and everyone wanted to sell."

In August, 1984, in the midst of Mexico's debt crisis, Slim made an important purchase. One of the major banks in the country, Bancomer, had been nationalized and forced to divest some of its holdings, and Slim acquired a package of securities. He says that he paid fifty-five million dollars for the package—"a lot of money for those times"—which included the insurance company Seguros de México. That company alone, Slim says, is today worth eleven billion dollars. A pattern was emerging. Bold action in the face of a crisis didn't just add to Slim's fortune; it multiplied it.

In my lifetime, there have been several occasions when people were saying 'Woe is the New York Times,' " Bill Keller, the executive editor of the newspaper, told me recently. We were sitting in the cafeteria of the *Times*' new headquarters, a six-hundred-million-dollar skyscraper at Forty-first Street and Eighth Avenue, which its architect,

Renzo Piano, describes as "a story about transparency and lightness"—quite a contrast to the paper's grubby former home, on West Forty-third Street. The *Times* sold that building in 2004, for a hundred and seventy-five million dollars; three years later, the new owners sold it again, for a profit of three hundred and fifty million.

"The old building was cramped and ill-suited to the reinvention that we were beginning to go through," Keller said. "It was not a pleasant place to come to work." As we talked, the *Times* was negotiating to sell a portion of its new headquarters for two hundred and twenty-five million dollars, and lease back the twenty-one floors housing its offices, with the option of repurchasing the space in ten years. Unlike many struggling American papers, Keller said, the *Times* had focussed on protecting its newsroom—"the reporters, editors, photographers, graphic artists, and Web producers. The people you need to actually *be* the New York Times." The *Times* is not as dependent on classified advertising as local papers, but, Keller admitted, "We've taken some hits. I've lived with the reality that we are headed toward some kind of transformation."

Like Carlos Slim, the *Times* management has exploited periods of economic turbulence to remake the company. Keller noted that during the recession of the mid-seventies the paper began publishing four sections, allowing for more advertising opportunities. In 1980, as the energy crisis was provoking another downturn, the *Times* made the ambitious decision to publish a national edition. "In my early days as an editor, I had someone explain to me the marketing strategy of the *Times*," Keller recalled. "What most newspapers do when they want to expand is to conduct a survey of people who don't read their paper and ask, 'What would make you like our paper better? What could we change to appeal to you?' Then they go and add the advice column or the comic strip—whatever it was that the nonreader said he wanted. The *Times*' approach was to go find our most loyal readers—who say they couldn't live without it, they read it every day—and to profile those people. Who are they? The strategy was to find more people like that, to define ourselves demographically, not geographically. The whole marketing apparatus was out there looking for people

who want what we're doing. The commitment to solid journalism wasn't just a slogan. It was a sound business proposition." In the current downturn, he said, "the energy and money we have invested in the Web site is roughly equivalent to those decisions."

Speaking about the future of the *Times*, Keller said, "I'm a calculated optimist. There's a crying demand for what we do and, sadly, a diminishing supply of it. How we get the demand to pay for the supply is the existential question of newspapers in general and the *Times* in particular."

"How much time do you have to figure it out?"

"A year or two," Keller said.

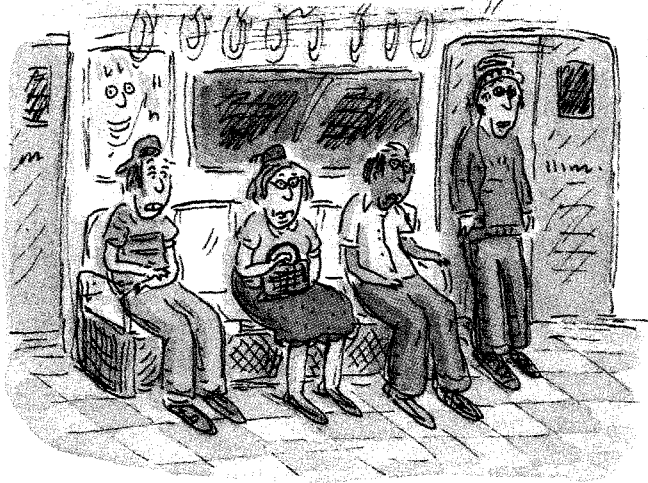
Although the *Times* won five Pulitzer Prizes this year, it lost \$74.5 million in the first quarter. "The crucial question is cash," a *Times* business reporter told me. "Cutting costs and selling assets can only take you so far." He added, "If you told me we're going to file for bankruptcy in ten months, I'd find that plausible."

Many *Times* employees have begun to wonder how long the Ochs-Sulzberger family can hold on. "Any change in ownership would be highly traumatic," Frank Rich, the *Times* columnist, says. "The journalistic institutions that remain truly independent are generally those run by founding families." Most other American papers have been taken over by chains, such as Gannett or Hearst, or folded into corporations where the news is a small part of a larger enterprise. Such newspapers, Rich says, "lose ambition. In some cases, they've been hollowed out." Thomas Friedman, the *Times*' chief foreign-affairs columnist, lauded the efforts that Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., has made to keep the newsroom intact, saying, "I just have a great deal of admiration for him." He told me that since taking his current post, in 1995, he has never been asked by Sulzberger what he was planning to write, or how high his travel expenses would be. "To be able to say what I want to say and go where I want to go—other than a Sulzberger-owned newspaper, you tell me where that exists today." (Of course, star reporters like Friedman live in a special universe, even at the *Times*.) Friedman said that there will always be a demand for "qual-

Subway Chanteys

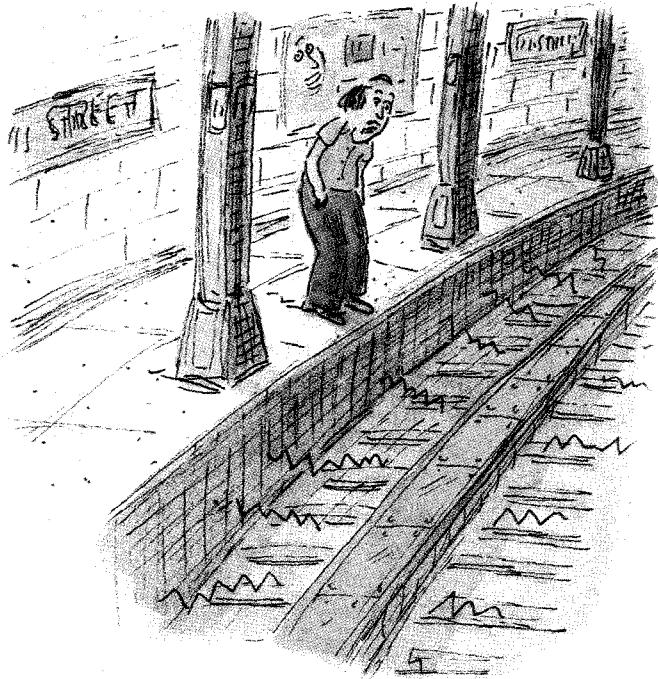
Rolling, Rolling

Rolling, rolling,
Over the bounding track,
We'll take the ③ or take the ④,
And then we'll take it back.



Lift That Barge

Lift that barge, tote that bale,
Don't step on that ol' third rail.



Sixteen Tons

Sixteen tons, and what do you guess?
Is she a local, or is she express?
I'm so tired from my head to my feet,
Big fat man takin' up three seats!!!



Up She Rises

Hey, hey, up she rises,
No delays, no surprises,
Getting off at Twenty-third Street
Earl-eye in the morning.



R. C. W.

ity, branded news that people can trust," but he believes that the shakeout of news organizations is going to be extreme: "It's going to be us and the BBC and the *Wall Street Journal* and not a lot more." At some point, Friedman said, the *Times* is "probably going to need a partner of one kind or another. I just hope it's a junior partner to the Sulzberger family." Friedman proposed a candidate—"someone with the ethics and journalistic integrity of Michael Bloomberg," the mayor of New York, who has his own news empire.

I asked the business reporter if bankruptcy might be a tactic that Sulzberger would employ in a desperate attempt to keep the paper in the family; during bankruptcy, management would have a period to reorganize without being preyed upon by outside speculators. "We're watching this happen in Philadelphia right now," the reporter replied, noting that the *Inquirer* was in bankruptcy proceedings. In that case, he said, "the creditors have made it clear that they don't want to emerge as owners. There's every expectation that the current owners and management will remain." A similar story is taking place in Minneapolis, with the *Star-Tribune*. If the *Times* files for Chapter Eleven,

however, its creditors may well see it as an opportunity for change, in which case the company's fate would be largely in the hands of Carlos Slim.

In 1990, the Mexican government began privatizing national industries, including the archaic phone company, Telmex. People had to wait years to get a telephone line; the few public phones rarely worked; and large parts of the country were unconnected. The Mexican economy was stagnant and overwhelmed by foreign debt. It sorely needed investment, especially in communications infrastructure. The President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, saw privatization as an opportunity to create strong Mexican businesses that could compete in a global market. At first glance, Telmex did not seem like much of a prize, but the government offered the future owners a monopoly on long-distance calls for six years. Cell phones were still a novelty in Mexico, and the few carriers that existed generally had licenses for certain regions and not others. The government tossed into the deal a cellular license that covered the entire country. This turned out to be one of the most precious business concessions ever awarded.

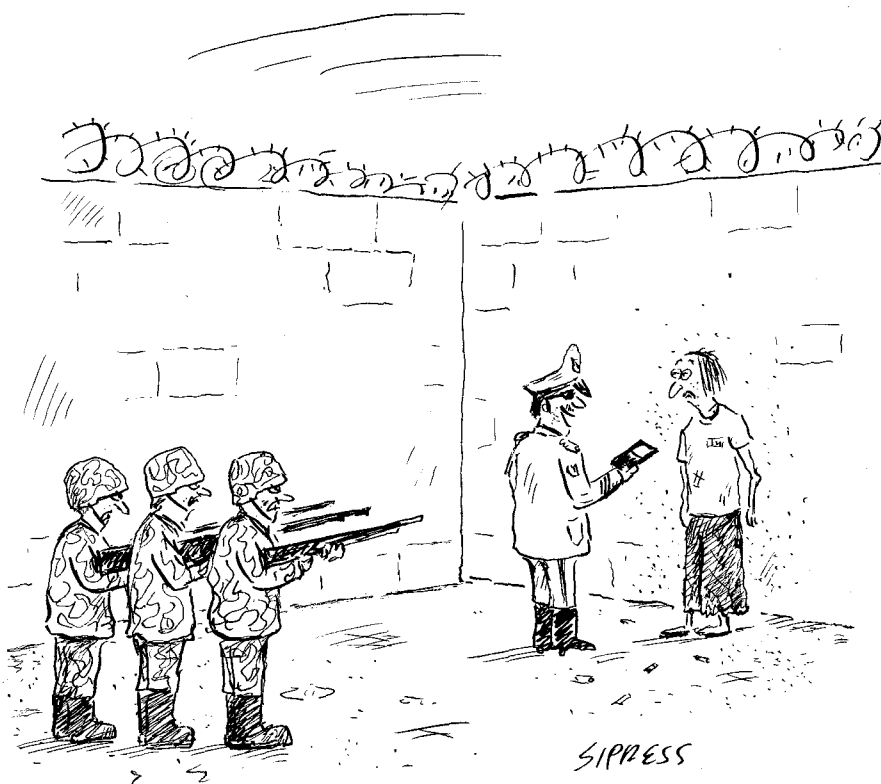
In September, 1989, when the gov-

ernment announced its intention to sell Telmex, the company had been valued at a little more than three billion dollars; three years later, when the sale finally took place, the market value of the company jumped to more than eight billion dollars, attracting the attention of international investment firms. "The privatization of Telmex helped create the whole category of emerging markets," a former Mexican Secretary of Finance and Public Credit told me.

There were two main competitors bidding for Telmex. Slim put together a team that included Southwestern Bell and France Telecom. He recounted the story as we drove across town, in his black Ford S.U.V. "The government was selling 20.4 per cent of Telmex voting stock with an option for five per cent of non-voting stock," he said. Slim's team submitted the highest bid, for \$1.76 billion, but he has been dogged for years by the rumor that he won because of his ties to Salinas; both men strongly dispute the charge.

We were riding along hilly residential streets; the houses were hidden behind high walls, often topped by coiled razor wire or electric fences. An orchestral version of "Unchained Melody" played on the CD player. The fact that Slim drives himself is seen as eccentric, even reckless, given Mexico's high car-jacking and kidnapping rates. (In 1994, Slim's cousin Alfredo Harp Helú was kidnapped; he was released after the family paid a thirty-million-dollar ransom.) I asked Slim if he felt safe on the road. "Yes, but they come with me," he said, gesturing to the car behind us, which was carrying armed bodyguards. It wasn't an army, I observed. Slim shrugged. "A few years ago, we didn't need to have anyone," he said.

Telmex came encumbered by a powerful union, obsolete copper lines, and seven thousand telephone operators whose jobs had been made superfluous by direct dialling. "Half of the people there were not necessary," Slim says. Under the terms of the deal, however, he agreed that no one would be fired. He mollified the union by awarding the workers stock. He established the Telmex Institute of Technology to retrain his employees. He invested thirty billion dollars in infrastructure and laid thousands of miles of fibre-optic cable.



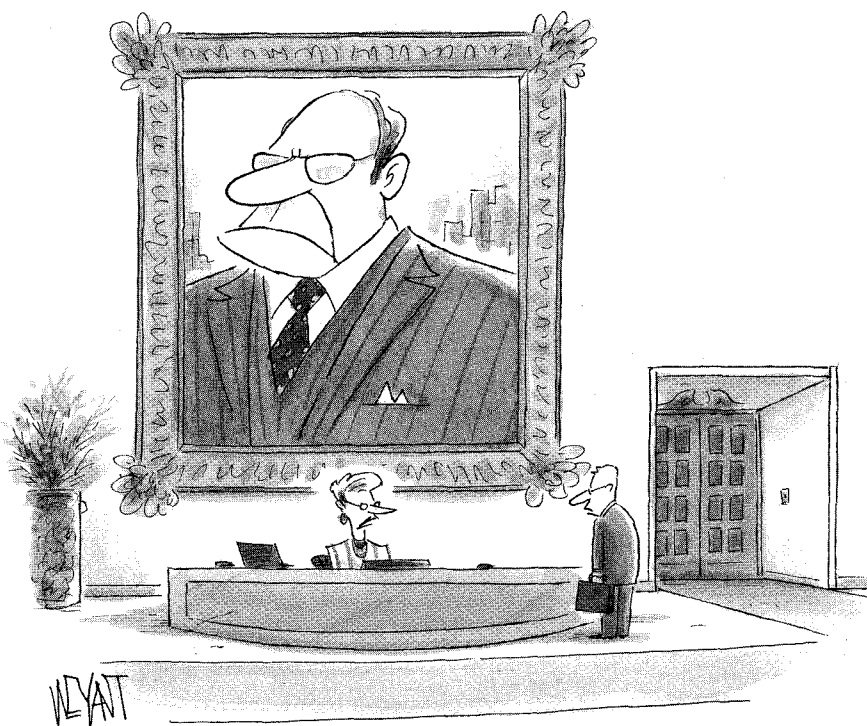
"Last tweet?"

By 1993, he says, there was no longer a waiting list for people wanting to get a telephone line.

Southwestern Bell, one of Telmex's partners, sent a young executive from Oklahoma named Randall Stephenson to work with Slim in 1992. "It was really exciting," Stephenson, who is now the C.E.O. of A.T. & T., recalls. "You have very few opportunities in life where it is just grow, grow, grow." Stephenson says of Slim, "He's probably the most intelligent businessman I've met."

When Stephenson arrived in Mexico, there were only twenty thousand wireless subscribers in the country. He expected to implement the U.S. model in Mexico: "In the U.S., we were getting seventy dollars per subscriber, per month." Slim told him that such a plan would never work in Latin America; twenty dollars was more realistic. "He was a zealot on this," Stephenson says. "Around the world, telecom has evolved as a monopoly business, where you look at your cost, then set prices based on your cost. Carlos comes into telecom with a hypercompetitive, capitalistic mentality, and says you've got to price these services to really penetrate and achieve deep demand. He was the first to really challenge our thinking." Slim, who had learned something about marketing from his cigarette business, decided to place low-cost telephones in discount and convenience stores. "The concept was to go to the customer, not wait for the customer to come to you," he says. He also came up with what he calls the Gillette plan, subsidizing the cost of handsets, which might be out of reach for many Mexicans, and making money off pre-paid calling cards, just as Gillette makes its profit from the blades, not the razors. Slim believes that Telmex was the first company to pair calling cards with mobile phones. "In the telephone business, volume is more important than price," he says. The cell-phone company that Slim eventually spun off, América Móvil, now has nearly two hundred million users in Latin America, and an average monthly revenue of ten dollars per subscriber. It is one of the most profitable telecom companies in the world.

In the mid-nineties, Mexico was once again facing a debt crisis, along with a high deficit and a lack of foreign-currency reserves. In December, 1994,



"He's in a meeting right now. Would you like to speak with his portrait?"

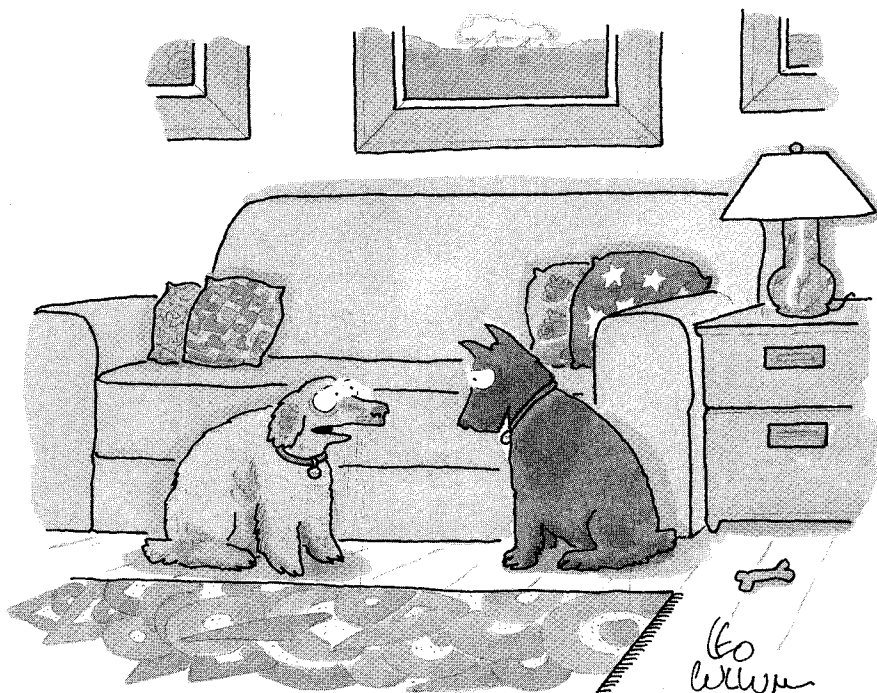
the government loosened control of the peso, and its value slid by forty per cent—a potential death blow to Telmex. Most of its expenses—the cell phones, the cable—were in dollars, but its revenues were in pesos. "That's when it got real interesting," Stephenson says. "We were all in Carlos Slim's conference room. I said, 'We've got to cut capital spending.'" At the time, Telmex was investing about two billion dollars a year; Stephenson proposed cutting expenditures to \$1.2 billion. "That felt pretty aggressive to me," he says. Slim said that he was going to cut back to six hundred million dollars. "The thought that you could scale down the spending levels that far was really bold," Stephenson says. "But, by golly, we did it. On a dime."

Slim learned one important lesson from the peso crisis: as a hedge, he began pegging Telmex's interconnection rate to the dollar, effectively passing the cost of devaluation on to his rivals. "It's been an incredible windfall for him," a competitor told me. "The peso has been devalued by thirty per cent in the past six months alone."

In the late nineties, the Mexican government began establishing regulations to offset Telmex's increasing power, but

they had little effect. Roberto Newell, the head of the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness, a think tank, acted as a consultant to the government during the privatization of Telmex. He recalls, "In privatizing Telmex as a monopoly to gain value, we made the wrong assumption—that the Mexican executive branch would be strong enough and competent enough to push back if the monopoly got out of hand. We should have known better." Instead, Newell contends, Telmex turned into "an enormous cash cow," which gave Slim the leverage to wade into other sectors of the Mexican economy and gain lopsided market shares. Newell recalls, "In the fiscal crisis, the Mexican government didn't even have the resources to hire a good lawyer. We simply didn't have the guns on board to face the de-facto monopoly we created before it became too large to stop."

During the peso crisis in 1995, Thomas Friedman reported from Mexico on the fifty-billion-dollar bailout sponsored by the Clinton Administration. The *Times* bureau in Mexico City was next door to Slim's office, on Paseo de Las Palmas, and many of the correspondents got to know him. Anthony DePalma, who was in the bureau at the time, accompanied Fried-



"Something is definitely going on. We're back to eating dog food."

man to an interview with Slim. "Slim invited us to his mother's house, in Polanco, which he keeps as a kind of museum," DePalma recalls. "He wasn't yet the richest man in the world, but he certainly was the richest man in Mexico, and he was as bowled over by meeting Tom as anybody I've ever seen." Slim insisted on showing his guests a chair that he broke when he was a child. "It wasn't the kind of thing you'd do unless you're really tied up with nerves," DePalma said. The men sat down for lunch—chicken mole, catered by Sanborns—and Slim held forth on Clinton and the bailout. He showed the reporters some photographs of a recent rafting trip he had taken with his sons; noting that he'd got banged up on the trip, he lifted his pants leg to show off some scabs on his shin. "It's a great story to see him as a robber baron," DePalma says. "But I also remember him as being a little starry-eyed by being that close to the *New York Times*."

Slim turned the S.U.V. onto Monte Líbano Street, named for the mountain range near his father's village in Lebanon. We began talking about the remarkable Lebanese community in Mexico, which includes, among others, the actress Salma Hayek—"one of the most beautiful women in the world," I

observed offhandedly. Slim grinned. "She's sexy, she's sensual," he conceded. "She's very short."

The historian Enrique Krauze had told me that Slim is "playful" on the subject of women. "He brags a bit." Since his wife died, Slim has been linked with several women, including Queen Noor of Jordan. "We're good friends," he says. It's unlikely that he will remarry. The loss of his wife is still too painful for him to talk about. Krauze said, "Soumy was like an Arabian princess—a woman with an angelic voice and manner and an unforgettable smile." He went on, "I saw Carlos a few days after she died. He said, 'I must stay rational or I'm going to lose my mind.'"

Slim turned into the gated driveway of a house that he uses as an office. In the garage was a 1941 Cadillac under a plastic cover. "My kids gave it to me," he said. "It's like the car I had when I learned to drive." We went into the dining room, where he often holds meetings. On the dining-room table was a wilted bouquet from the garden, a moldy lemon, a book about handwriting analysis, and a plastic replica of a Ford Crown Victoria, another car that Slim used to drive. He turned on an iPod that was connected to a small

speaker dock. His music preferences lean toward easy listening, but I also noticed an Elvis compilation CD. There was a bronze miniature of Rodin's "The Kiss" on top of a cluttered cabinet. Slim's Museo Soumaya owns three hundred Rodin sculptures—the largest collection outside France.

Slim quickly lost himself in a Merrill Lynch report. He had a red ballpoint pen and made tiny annotations on the page as we talked.

"What are you seeing when you look at that?" I asked.

"The numbers, they talk to me." Slim explained that the report showed the market penetration of mobile-telephone services around the world, over time. "Today, maybe eighty per cent of the population of Latin America has a mobile telephone," he said—a figure well above the sixty-five-per-cent market penetration in Canada, which, I noticed, had a small red circle around it. He drew a line under Mexico. "We had only 26.4-per-cent market penetration in 2004, and now it has grown to 80.5. Three-hundred-per-cent growth! Do you think that's bad for Mexico?" He rolled up the sleeves of his discreetly monogrammed pale-blue shirt. "Peru," he said, drawing another line; there market penetration had increased from 8.6 per cent in 2002 to 61.6 per cent last year. TracFone, a carrier he owns in the U.S., is now the fifth-largest mobile operator in the country. In Argentina and Brazil, the numbers told a similar story. "We are the ones that understand pre-paid the best," Slim said.

Slim's monopoly on long-distance calls in Mexico ended in January, 1997, but his telecommunication companies remained overwhelmingly dominant. "The common wisdom is that privatization created monopolies," former President Salinas, who left office in 1994, told me. "But nobody ever looked at what happened after my administration ended." Telmex still owns about ninety per cent of Mexico's phone lines and, according to the government, has long resisted sharing its network with competitors, even though it is legally obligated to do so. The Telmex spinoff América Móvil controls seventy-two per cent of the Mexican cell-phone market. Strictly speaking, neither of these businesses is a monopoly, but both exist as what Salinas calls "islands of privilege"—operating at a competitive

advantage that makes it nearly impossible for other companies to gain market share. And yet that is true of nearly every key industry in Mexico. The World Bank, which in 2007 published a study of the slow-growing Mexican economy, asserts that monopolies, both public and private, are the country's main obstacles to economic growth and business development. Mexico is one of the worst countries in the world in terms of competitiveness, and the costs of natural gas and fuel oil are among the highest in the world. Electricity costs as much as sixty per cent more than it does in the U.S.

These industries are government monopolies; the World Bank report singles out Telmex as "a private monopoly," noting that its telephone charges are significantly higher than those elsewhere in Latin America. Because Telmex controls nearly all the landlines in Mexico, it has historically been able to charge a very high interconnection rate—the charge that one carrier bills another to complete a call to one of its customers. In 2008, the company made nearly half a billion dollars in gross profits on interconnection charges.

For more than a decade, government regulators and Telmex lawyers engaged in a battle that resembled Mexican free-style wrestling: there was a lot of exciting action, but nothing much happened. In 2006, however, the administration of the newly elected President, Felipe Calderón, made a push to reform the telecom sector. That year, Rafael del Villar, who was then Under-Secretary of Communications, along with his boss, Luis Téllez, the Secretary of Communications and Transport, demanded that Telmex slash its interconnection rates for landline and mobile calls. "Telmex fought this resolution bitterly," Villar told me. "It even took actions to put the minister and me in jail." (Telmex acknowledges that it attempted to prevent Téllez and Villar from enforcing the resolution, but says that imprisonment was not the company's goal; eventually, a court ruled against the company.) A former Telmex lawyer told me that the company's legal strategy was to challenge every decision that the regulatory agencies made, thereby delaying enforcement. "We obtained more than two hundred injunctions," the lawyer said. "We created an incredible legal

and procedural mess." Telmex competitors have also been threatened with legal charges. One of Slim's telecom rivals told me, "I know of at least two executives who had to leave the country for a while to avoid an arrest warrant that Telmex got from a judge. They've created a culture of fear that has paralyzed the industry." (Of the men who left the country Slim says, "Maybe they did something bad.")

Francisco Gil Díaz, who is currently the head of the Mexican division of Telefónica, the Spanish telecom giant, criticized the tactics of Slim's companies at a meeting in Washington last year. "We have a state within the state, a power within itself that can influence and block policies to its advantage," he said. When Telefónica launched a national mobile-phone service in Mexico, in 2002, it attempted to attract new customers with the now familiar approach of selling highly subsidized handsets. But the handsets were swept up and resold, creating a huge loss for Telefónica. In 2005, the company filed a formal complaint against América Móvil, claiming that it was responsible for the reselling scheme. Slim denies this, but an investigation is ongoing. Slim blames Telefónica for its naïveté. "When you are selling handsets at twenty dollars, and their actual value is sixty dollars, there are going to be a lot of dealers repackaging them," he says.

By 2000, it was clear that the frontier for telecom lay in broadband communications, but few Mexicans owned computers. Slim began selling computers that could be paid for in installments on the monthly telephone bill; by his own calculations, he has become the leading computer dealer in Mexico. Despite the fact that Telmex lines were set up for voice transmission, Slim has wrested the broadband market from his competitors. "In 2003, the cable companies had forty-three per cent of the market, and we had forty-two," he said. "Since then, they have grown fifty per cent a year, and we've grown ninety per cent." According to the Organization for Economic Coöperation and Development,



Mexico's broadband is one of the slowest and most expensive of its member states.

"People like Slim don't seem to agree that monopolies or oligopolies hurt the country," Benito Ohara, the president of M.C.M., a telecom provider in Mexico City, told me. "Here in Mexico, you have monopolies in electricity, water, transportation, steel, television, radio, bread, and beer—and so companies are saddled with these humongous costs. The only line item that you can control as a small Mexican businessman is salaries. That's why Mexican workers are paid so little." Investment is discouraged, Ohara said, because monopolies have no incentive to spend their capital, and potential investors don't want to fight entrenched interests. "The last thing anybody wants is to invest in an industry where Slim is," Ohara added. "They know he's going to beat the crap out of them."

Slim has compiled a list of ten principles that form his business philosophy. Many of them go back to his father's lessons. The first principle is to keep corporate structures simple. Although Slim controls hundreds of companies, he doesn't have a corporate headquarters; typically, the chief executive of each company remains near the sales force or the factory floor. Another rule relates to "maintaining austerity in good times." Telmex's headquarters, for instance, has been in the same cinder-block building ever since Slim took control of it, nineteen years ago. Many of the government-issue Formica desks are still in use. It's a pointed contrast with the majestic Telefónica tower across town—or the gorgeous Times Building, for that matter.

Even Slim's adversaries admire his purposefulness and the ways in which his companies embody his character. "He's ruthless, yes," Roberto Newell said. "Totally amoral, perhaps. Immoral, no." But he admitted, "I don't know whether to love him or hate him. I'm just fascinated by his competence."

One afternoon, I had lunch with a group of Mexican businessmen. All had done business with Slim or his companies—it was nearly impossible to avoid—and none of the men wanted to be quoted by name. One claimed that he had been directly threatened by Slim's

employees: "Two guys came to my business and said that if we didn't take down our microwave link Telmex was going to cut all our telecommunications." (Slim doesn't remember the incident, but says that it would have happened only if the business was using microwave links as an unauthorized bypass, "making long-distance a local call.")

Many of my lunch companions marvelled at Slim's business instincts. "He bought into Brazil at just the right time," an investment banker said. "He bought into Argentina right after the 2001 crisis, and now he has forty per cent of the mobile business. Same story in Colombia. Brilliant."

A former Slim employee said, "He just used the free ride he got twenty years ago from the Mexican government. If you call that brilliant, it's brilliant."

"But this country is full of people who got free rides and went bust," the banker observed. Many heads nodded.

The banker then recalled, "Slim was shopping in New York, and he went to Saks." The other men smiled, knowing what this really meant: Slim went shopping *for* Saks. "He estimated the square footage of the building, then he called a friend and asked about the value of real estate on Fifth Avenue. He calculated that the stock was valued at a fraction of what the building alone was worth! So he put in an order to buy." By the end of November, Slim had accumulated twenty-five million shares, amounting to seventeen per cent of the company. ("It was clear that the price of the stock was lower than the real-estate value," Slim says. "It was a good company with a very good brand.") That month, Saks renewed a "poison pill" provision that prevents any shareholder from acquiring twenty per cent or more of the company.

Slim's entanglement with Saks was not the first time that he had ventured into the U.S. for a major purchase. He had been a principal investor in CompUSA, the computer retail chain, which filed for bankruptcy in 2007. "He has to turn elsewhere to make his investments," a Mexican columnist told me. "He's running out of things in Mexico to buy."

I asked the men if they held Slim responsible for the faltering Mexican economy. "It's ridiculous to say that Slim is responsible for Mexico not growing,"

THE ANIMALS

A "domesticated bearded dragon \$400"
is not my idea of an animal companion.
A calf asleep on a double bed, perhaps,
or a hare with long ears
crouched under a mahogany sideboard,
thumping the floor.
Or a koala that climbed up a four-poster bed
surprising a seventeen-year-old in her nightie.

They were here before us—the animals—
and we were once them.
Without understanding we watched the sunrise
and the coming of night,
registered the changing of seasons
and dew on leaves that brushed our flanks.
We, the animals,
knew feelings, had a memory,
exchanged sounds and visual cues,
but did not know
what came before
or ask what was to come.

A neighbor sleeps with a wombat in her bed,
and her husband sleeps on the veranda.
Kangaroos watch TV through her sitting-room window.

one man offered. "The public-sector monopolies are much more problematic. They are all extremely inefficient and corrupt."

Wasn't Slim merely a product of the Mexican system? "He is a product of the system," another man said. "Until one day the system becomes a product of him."

In March of last year, Luis Téllez, the Secretary of Communications and Transport, convened a secret meeting between Slim and President Calderón, at Los Pinos, the Mexican executive mansion. Téllez hoped that the government and Slim could, in a statesman-like manner, work out a grand plan that would open the communications sector to increased competition; in return, the government would offer Slim something that he desperately wanted—television.

Under the original terms of the Telmex privatization, the company was prohibited from offering television service. At the time, the government was

more frightened of another rapacious Mexican titan, Emilio Azcárraga, who controlled Televisa, Mexico's leading television network. In part, Telmex was set up to act as a counterweight to Televisa. The two entities were considered too powerful to be allowed to mix together. Since then, however, the distinction between telecommunications and television has blurred. All over the world, there is a fierce contest between cable, D.S.L., satellite, and Internet service providers to offer voice, data, and television packages to their customers—what is known in the industry as the "triple play." In Mexico, Telmex is the only telephone company forbidden to enter the fray.

Even Mexican regulators recognized that the Telmex restriction was obsolete and actually worked against the competitive business environment that they had hoped to create. "Televisa feels menaced by Slim's entrance into television, which is good news for competition," Villar, who is now a commissioner at the Federal Telecommunications

Bottle-fed joeys get osteoporosis
if the composition of the milk isn't right.
The females make better companions.
With shy brown eyes
they hop along beside you
as you collect mail from the gate at dusk.

We were once them,
and now are their custodians.
They know we are different
and their eyes tell us to keep our promise.

Bill came home after a fortnight away.
Potted plants had been kicked off the veranda,
there was an awful smell,
and the front door was ajar.
Inside the house
chairs were overturned,
papers and cushions trampled on floors,
and in the bathroom,
wedged against the washbasin,
her putrid flesh held together by hide,
Twinkle, a pony.
A tractor winched the body out.

—Geoffrey Lehmann

Commission, told me. "I'm happy these guys don't like each other."

The meeting at Los Pinos took place around a large U-shaped table. On one side were Slim and his team, including his son Carlos, Jr., who runs the family holding company; his nephew Héctor Slim, who is the C.E.O. of Telmex; his son-in-law Danny Hajj, who runs América Móvil; and another son-in-law, Arturo Elías, who is Slim's spokesman. On the other side of the table were Téllez, Villar, and two expert witnesses. The President sat in the bend of the U. Villar, whose efforts to bring Telmex to heel can seem evangelical, presented the government's demands. "We're going to let you into TV, Carlos Slim, but first we have to agree on a set of terms," Villar said. The terms included reasonable interconnection fees, reducing long-distance costs, sharing the Telmex infrastructure, and eliminating the practice of rounding up the charge for a call to the next minute. The revenue that Slim's empire would lose if he agreed to these concessions far ex-

ceeded the value of the entire television business in Mexico.

In response, Slim's team presented figures suggesting that interconnection rates in Mexico were competitive with those of other countries. As for opening up the Telmex infrastructure, Slim's team argued, such an approach had been tried in the U.S. after the breakup of A.T.&T., and the result was diminished investment in updating equipment.

For two and a half hours, the participants wrangled, to the point that the President had to ask them to settle down. According to three participants, Slim was so angry that he threatened to sell Telmex. Slim denies that he said exactly that: "I said, 'Tell me what you

want. If you want me to sell, O.K. If you want us to divide it into two parts, three parts, O.K.'" He added, "The only thing we will not do is destroy Telmex."

The meeting ended in a stalemate. Despite the government's opposition, Slim quickly found a way for Telmex to offer television service, through a commercial agreement with a satellite-dish provider, but he still can't deliver it himself. That will change, he assured me, "sooner rather than later."

Denise Dresser is a writer and a professor of political science at the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico, and one of the country's best-known columnists. She spent several years studying and working in Los Angeles, and returned to her homeland in 2002. "I started studying why the Mexican economy doesn't grow," she told me. "So much led me back to Carlos Slim."

Dresser is slight and precise; she describes herself as having been "the top nerd" in school. When she returned to Mexico City, Dresser and her husband set up the same telecommunications system—four landlines, two fax lines, two cellular phones—that they had had in Los Angeles. They were surprised to discover that in Mexico such a plan cost three times as much.

Dresser began writing a series of highly negative articles about Slim and his effect on the Mexican economy. Until then, Slim had rarely been criticized in public. Dresser's articles shocked many readers, and they helped to frame the case against him. "He bought a monopoly and has turned it into an empire," she wrote in the newspaper *Reforma*, in 2005. "Carlos Slim has the best deal in the world, but the Mexican consumer has one of the worst."

After a dozen such attacks appeared, Slim invited Dresser to his office for a meeting. She was nervous, and prepared notes. She sat down at the dining-room table. Slim asked if she would like something to drink. "I'd like a glass of mineral water with ice," she said. He disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a can of water. Dresser was put off by his informality. "Mexico is a place of such grace," she says. "You would ex-



pect a glass on a platter with a napkin.”

“So,” Slim said. “You don’t like me.”

“I don’t really *know* you,” she said, then added, “You look thinner than your pictures.”

Dresser pulled out her notes. She said to Slim that Telmex was a modern business, thanks to his efforts, but its services were too expensive. The lack of competition and the high cost of telecommunications were blocking progress and inhibiting innovation. He competed perfectly well in other countries, so why not foster competition in Mexico, rather than being a bottleneck?

“You understand numbers, don’t you?” Slim asked, as he dumped a pile of documents in front of her.

“I didn’t expect him to be so boorish,” she recalls. “When he shoved those papers at me, I wanted to cry. I said, ‘Don’t speak to me that way! I’m not your wife or your daughter or your employee! I’m a Mexican citizen with rights! And I came to talk about what is best for Mexico.’”

According to Dresser, Slim immediately softened. She went over her points,

telling him that he had become the emblematic figure of crony capitalism in Mexico. “He didn’t understand the term,” she says. “It was as if he had never heard these arguments before.”

“So, you want me to give away market share,” Slim summarized.

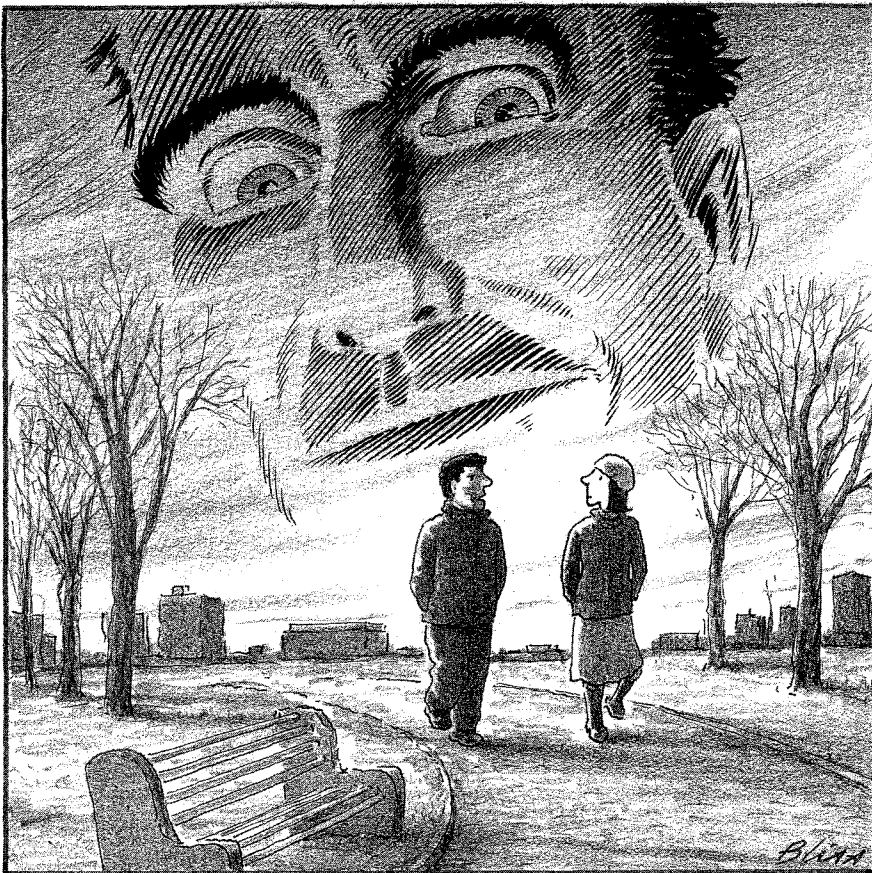
“No, I want the pie to grow,” she said. “Maybe your slice will be smaller, but the pie will be bigger for everyone.” Then she appealed to him to become “the Bill Gates of Mexico,” by giving away a sizable portion of his wealth. (To date, Gates has donated more than twenty-seven billion dollars to charity.) Slim and Dresser talked past each other for two hours, and then he walked her to the door. “I respect you,” he told her.

Slim had already founded several charitable organizations, although he admitted to me, “I don’t believe in charities too much. . . . They can make you popular . . . but you don’t solve any problems.” Aside from his art museum, he has created the Telmex Foundation and the Carlos Slim Foundation, which have rather diffuse mandates. Through

the Telmex Foundation, he has provided a hundred thousand computers to public schools, nearly two hundred thousand scholarships, seventy-eight thousand pairs of eyeglasses, and two hundred thousand bicycles, and has paid for nearly four hundred thousand surgeries; he also supports more than a hundred thousand soccer teams. The Carlos Slim Foundation has pledged, through Bill Clinton’s foundation, a hundred million dollars aimed at reducing poverty in Latin America; and a hundred and ten million to a foundation, affiliated with the pop star Shakira, that helps Latin-American children. Slim has also set up a fund to bail out impoverished prisoners who have committed petty crimes. But those efforts didn’t impress Dresser. “What he gives back with one hand does not compare with what he has taken with the other,” she said. In March, it was announced that Slim was giving his charitable foundations six billion dollars’ worth of stock. Dresser still wasn’t mollified. “The mere fact of its being tied to his business ventures seems an example of his small spirit,” she said.

Some of Slim’s donations do have the appearance of self-interest. In 2004, Slim negotiated a deal with the government: Cigatam and other cigarette companies would give the Health Ministry nine cents for every cigarette pack they sold. This was to go to public-health programs for tobacco-related illnesses. This placed the ministry in the awkward position of depending, in part, on cigarette sales for its funding. That arrangement has since been shelved.

In 2000, federal and local authorities asked Slim to undertake the renovation of Mexico City’s historic downtown, which had never recovered from the 1985 earthquake. Many beautiful sixteenth-century buildings were heavily damaged; shops and businesses had abandoned the neighborhood, leaving it to thieves, prostitutes, and addicts. Fifteen years of corrupt and feckless government oversight had left the area desolate and dangerous. Slim’s response illustrates his approach to social welfare. He bought a number of properties and retrofitted them as apartments, which he then offered to his employees at low rents. As is typical of a Slim development, the renovations were not elabo-



“Sometimes I get the feeling your ex is still in the picture.”

rate, but they were tasteful. Soon, other developers began coming into the area. Restaurants and coffee houses and jazz clubs sprang up. Tourists returned. New jobs were created. Property values increased, as did Slim's bank account.

Inside the gated house, Slim showed me some photographs of a recent birthday party. He had just turned sixty-nine, and was surrounded by his friends and children and grandchildren. In the photographs, he was wearing an Elvis outfit, complete with jewelled sunglasses and a blow-up plastic guitar. He looked really happy.

In October, 1997, Slim travelled to Houston to have a heart valve replaced. "It was not an emergency," he says, but after the surgery the new valve ruptured, and he suffered a severe hemorrhage. "They gave me a hundred and thirty bags of blood," he says. He stayed in Houston to recuperate. Few people knew about the surgery, but six weeks later there was a report in a Mexican newspaper that Slim had died of a heart attack. The stock prices of his companies momentarily plunged.

Slim's children were already in positions of authority in the family empire, but since his heart operation he has relinquished control over the daily operation of his many enterprises. "My job is to think," he likes to say. Meanwhile, he stays very close to his family. Every Monday night, he hosts dinner for his extended clan, and on weekends they often gather to watch sports on television. Like the Sulzbergers, the Slims clearly intend to keep their empire to themselves.

While we were going through the party photographs, I asked Slim why he had invested in the *Times*. "We think it's the best newspaper," he said. "The best brand. . . . We believe in media content. We think paper will disappear, but not the content. The content will be more important." I asked him if he read the *Times*. "Only when I'm in the U.S.," he admitted.

Before investing in the *Times*, Slim bought a portion of the British company that owns the *Independent*, but that was a mistaken investment, he said—"a bad one." In our conversations, Slim repeatedly said that he wasn't interested in producing content.

"Our business is to be the carriers," he said, emphasizing that he did not intend to be the future owner of the *Times*. "If I wanted to buy a newspaper, I would have done that fifty years ago. . . . Don't make me get involved in silly things." When I pressed him to discuss what he would do if the paper declared bankruptcy, he refused to acknowledge the possibility. He declined to say more on the record about the *Times*.

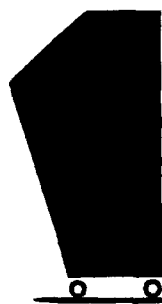
During my most recent visit to Mexico, President Obama passed through the country, on his way to a meeting of the Organization of American States. On April 16th, Slim, along with a hundred or so other prominent Mexicans, attended a dinner in the President's honor. Mexico City was then in the midst of the swine-flu epidemic, although the virus had not yet been identified. (Nobody in Slim's family was affected by the illness.) Obama asked Slim to visit him the next time he was in Washington. According to Enrique Krauze, who was at Slim's table, Obama said to Slim, "Make sure you talk to Larry Summers before you go, because we need your advice." (Summers, who is the director of the National Economic Council, was also at the event.) Slim did speak to Summers, and although what he said to him is private, he told me that "this crisis is the same one as 2000 and 2001." The bursting of the tech-stock bubble, followed by 9/11, had created a major slump in the American economy. Slim said that the U.S. government had "used all its resources to stop that, including two wars." The Federal Reserve dropped interest rates from 6.5 per cent in 2001 to zero in 2008; the Bush Administration cut taxes and increased spending. "All the tools that can be used, you used in 2003," he said. When the economy improved, though, the American government failed to adjust its fiscal policies, prompting an unsustainable boom in the stock market and in real-estate prices. "What was a crisis that could be managed has become a hard crash," he said.

In Slim's opinion, neither the Bush nor the Obama Administration responded with the right incentives to cope with the crisis. His own recipe: "First, stabilize the financial system. Instead of talking about toxic assets and other in-

vestments, you should recapitalize the banks through the public sector, using convertible bonds or preferred stocks." That would bring the credit markets back to normal, which is essential. "Credit, credit—you cannot stop the credit!" he exclaimed. "Credit is the contact with the real economy."

Next, he said, he would give more support to debtors, especially on mortgages for first-time home buyers, "to avoid the social consequences of this crisis." He expected double-digit figures in unemployment, and predicted that the U.S. economy will shrink by four or five per cent between October of 2008 and September of 2009. "There are more Chapter Elevens to come," he said.

If the problems are as dire as Slim's forecasts, then the economic crisis will be the greatest challenge of his long career. As usual, he is taking advantage of his cash-rich business to expand his empire during the downturn. He has announced that he expects to add more than thirty thousand jobs this year, at a time when few businesses in Mexico, or anywhere else, are prospering. "A businessman once asked me, 'How do you decide on your investments? Is it the P.E.'"—the price-to-earnings ratio—"or the assets?" Slim recalled. "I said, 'It's the potential for profit. I invest for the long term, not the short. If you buy something because it's cheap, that's only speculation.'" He is concentrating now on real-estate development and infrastructure, and on making investments in Latin America's 3G mobile telecommunications network. He is expecting to emerge from the crisis, whenever it ends, with a significantly greater market share, in Mexico and elsewhere. Investing now will give him an advantage over competitors who are hunkering down or who don't have the liquidity to exploit the situation. Seen in this context, Slim's investment in the *Times* is a bet on the long-term value of the journalism business. "I think content and information are important for our new civilization," he says. If the *Times* emerges, as some observers think it will, as one of the few major news sources in English, then Slim may find himself in a familiar spot: putting his money on a monopoly. ♦



WESTERN DISTURBANCES

Bruce Nauman's singular influence.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

Bruce Nauman and Susan Rothenberg have lived for the past twenty years on seven hundred acres of open, windswept land near Galisteo, New Mexico, south of Santa Fe. Rothenberg, a painter whose imagery hovers between abstraction and figuration, is sixty-four, high-spirited, talkative, small, easy to like. Nauman, who is four years older, and well over six feet in his made-to-order cowboy boots, has the watchful reticence and the physical bearing of an old-time Western movie star. His primary medium is sculpture, but he has used such a wide range of materials and media—including film, video, drawings, prints, performance, sound, and neon light—that his work has no signature style. Art lovers looking for beauty or visual pleasure are advised to look elsewhere; they find much of Nauman's work boring or irritating, and sometimes highly offensive. "PAY ATTENTION MOTHERFUCKERS," he suggests, in a 1973 lithograph that spells out this message in large mirror-image capitals. To see it is to comply.

Nauman's and Rothenberg's studios are in separate buildings behind the functional one-story house they designed for themselves. A hand-lettered sign just inside the door to Rothenberg's reads "HI HONEY YOU'RE HOME!" In Nauman's, which is about sixty feet long by thirty feet wide, mounds of leftover detritus from completed art works take up most of the floor space, along with heavy-duty tools, empty cartons, extension cords, and a small enclave harboring two battered armchairs and a table piled with assorted books: two Ross Thomas paperbacks, Gabriel García Márquez's "Memories of My Melancholy Whores," Ezra Pound's "Cantos," Xenophon's "The Art of Horsemanship."

The couple live alone in Galisteo. Nauman has no studio assistant. His stu-

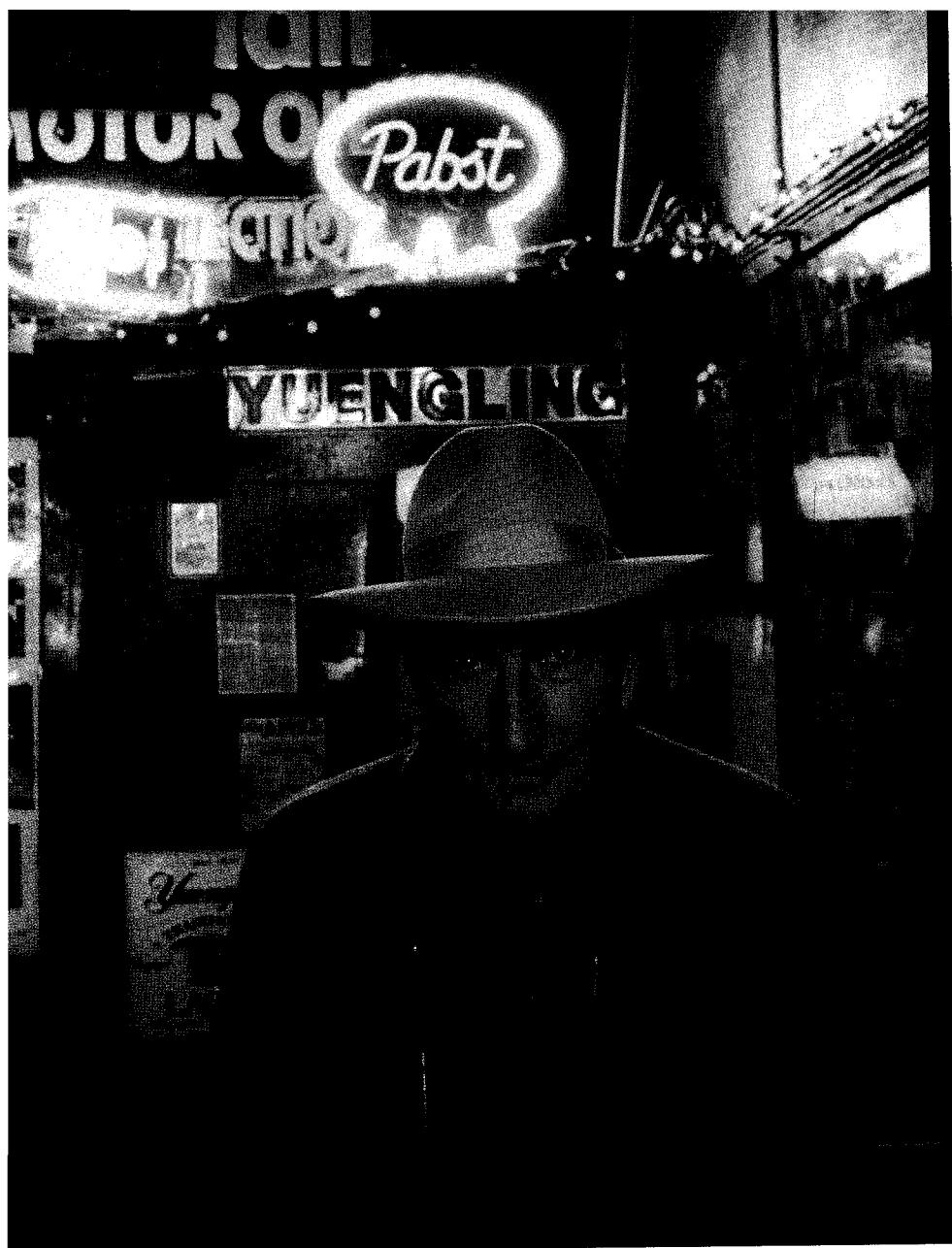
dio manager and archivist, Juliet Myers, whose hot-pink-and-orange hair style is a Santa Fe landmark, drives out every Wednesday. "I have the job mainly because I can say 'No, thank you' in about a thousand different ways," she jokes. "Bruce appreciates that I can keep the world at bay." The Naumans go into Santa Fe now and then, but they steer clear of the thriving art colony there. Non-art activities occupy a lot of their time. They both like to cook. Rothenberg feeds the chickens (they have six), and takes their three mixed-breed dogs on long hikes. She combs the dry hills behind the house for potsherds, arrowheads, and other artifacts of the ruined Galisteo pueblo, where a Tewa-speaking people flourished from the late twelve-hundreds to about 1690, on what is now the Naumans' land. Her finds fill many drawers and shelves in the house, and she has assembled a dozen or more complete pots. Nauman gets up at seven each morning to feed his fourteen horses, which he breeds, raises, trains, and sells. They are quarter horses, "working horses," he explains. "Some turn out to be pleasure horses, but they're bred to work cattle." His partner, Bill Riggins, runs a horse-and-cattle ranch that they own jointly in Santa Rosa, sixty miles to the southwest. It provides income, as well as steaks.

When I visited Nauman's studio in March, two rows of square white ultrathin loudspeakers, clipped to floor-to-ceiling cables, ran the length of the room. This was his "Days/Giorni" project, a new sound work that will debut on June 7th at the Venice Biennale. He fiddled with an audio keyboard on a table, and played a bit of the Italian version. Four male and three female voices intoned the days of the week—*domenica, lunedì, martedì*—skipping or adding days in varying sequences. (An English-language version will be installed at another location in Venice.)

Walking slowly between two rows of speakers, arranged so that each voice comes from a pair on opposite sides of the room, was like moving through discrete ribbons of sound. The effect was hypnotic. What might have been merely monotonous seemed rich and full of nuance—the human voice making unintentional music as it evokes the passage of time. More than thirty other works by Nauman, from all phases of his career, will be on view in Venice. "Vices and Virtues" (1983-88), seven of each, intertwined in flashing neon letters seven feet high, will encircle the cornice of the United States pavilion on the Biennale grounds. Inside, and in two venerable buildings on the other side of the Grand Canal, Nauman's videos and animated neon sculptures will share space with flayed animal sculptures, hanging male and female heads, and other works, including, in a window, his mockingly cryptic 1967 sign: "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths." The survey, which was organized by Carlos Basualdo and Michael Taylor, of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, is a long-delayed public affirmation of Nauman's status as the most influential living artist.

To many people, Nauman's influence is hard to fathom. Ever since his first show, in 1966, at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, his prickly, ungratifying work has disturbed viewers, infuriated more than a few critics, and fascinated artists. His early films, which were influenced by the single-image films of Andy Warhol, carried an emotional charge that seemed mysteriously unearned, and so did his blobby, awkward-looking sculptures in latex and fibreglass. As he went on in later years to explore new materials and stranger means, the impact deepened. "Matthew Barney, Kiki Smith, Jenny Holzer, Mike Kelley, Robert Gober, Tony Oursler: none of these

Probing relentlessly into the darker aspects of American life, Nauman helped to break the grip of Minimal art. Photograph by Steve Pyke.



catch-names in contemporary art could have arrived without Nauman," Andrew Solomon wrote in the *Times Magazine*, in 1995. He could also have named Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread, and most of the other Young British Artists. By bringing social and political content back into art (without cynicism), and by probing relentlessly into the darker aspects of American life, Nauman helped to break the grip of Minimal art. He forces you to experience his art viscerally, not just look at it. "Is there anybody like him?" Maurizio Cattelan, a conceptual master of startling images (such as his sculptural installation of the Pope struck down by a meteorite), asked me recently. When I said no, he muttered, "Damn."

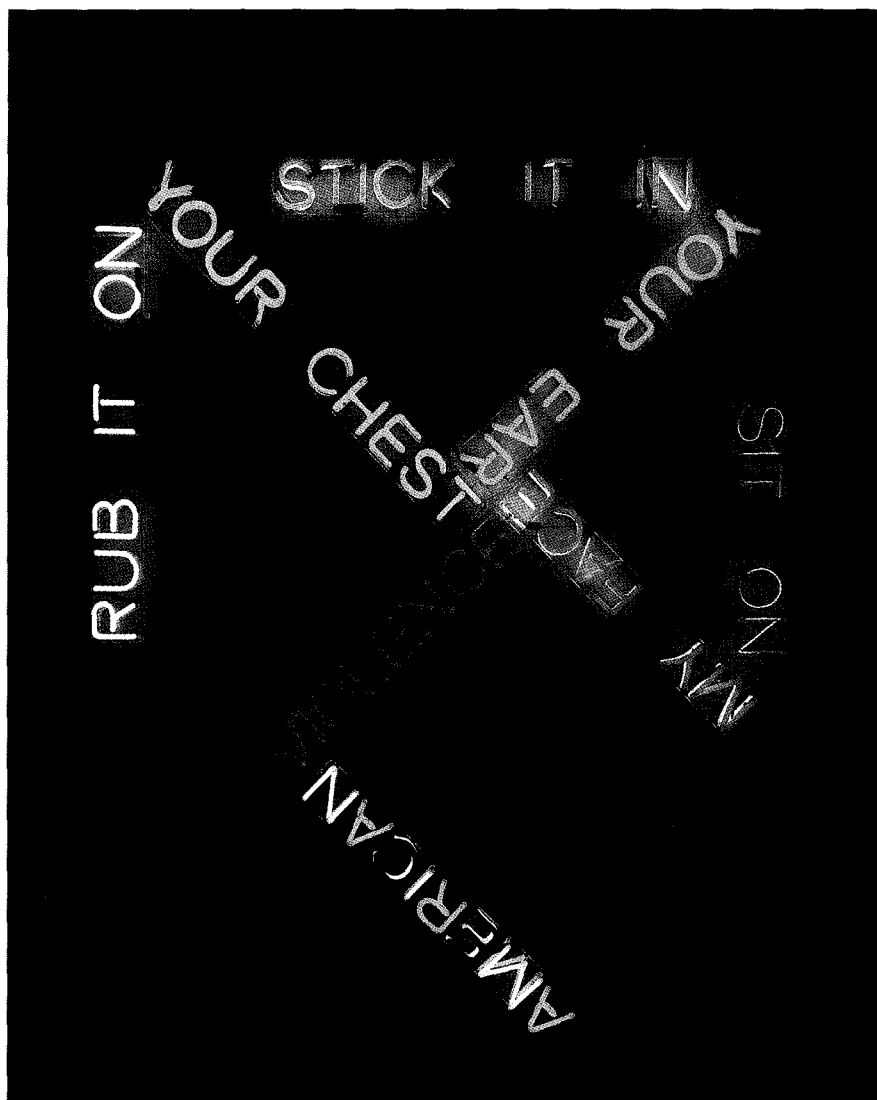
After an hour in the studio, we walked over to the main house, through a raffish garden whose main feature is a Nauman fountain made out of three bronze foxes stacked in a pyramid. It was late afternoon. Nauman poured himself a small glass of bourbon, neat, and sat down at a zinc-topped dining table. He wore work clothes—jeans, boots, and a frayed gray shirt. His large head reminded me of a Gilbert Stuart portrait of Washington, with its prominent nose and high, tapering forehead. Talking about his work or his life doesn't come easily to him, but the bourbon helps. Nauman speaks slowly, with frequent pauses to work out what he's going to say. We talked about the two years he'd spent in art school at the University of California's newly established graduate program at its Davis branch, near Sacramento. He had arrived in 1964, when the barriers between painting, sculpture, photography, film, dance, theatre, and music were eroding so fast that more and more artists felt free to use any and all of them, in any combination, for whatever purposes they had in mind. Coming from his undergraduate art studies at the University of Wisconsin, where the faculty had no patience with Abstract Expressionism or any later trends, was "like stepping out of the Middle Ages," Nauman said.

In Wisconsin he concentrated on painting, working his way (against faculty disapproval) to abstract landscapes in the style of Willem de Kooning. He quit painting soon after he got to Davis, and never went back to it. "I had to find some other way," he said. He tried performing—using his body as an impersonal object—but he

wasn't comfortable with that, so he started filming his performances instead. "I'd buy out-of-date film stock, which was cheap. I've always liked to use what's cheap and possible. I even tried writing poetry. Much later, some of that gets into the work." The abstract sculptures he was doing at Davis had a raw, unfinished look—like fragments of something else. Robert

Arneson, encouraged his experiments. "I was impressed with his openness," Wiley told me. "We shared an interest in what art could do, where it could go."

Unlike most art students, Nauman was married. His wife, Judy Govan, was a girl he had known slightly in the sixth grade in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee. They went to the same high



Anger became an inspiration in works such as "American Violence" (1981-82).

Morris, Richard Serra, Eva Hesse, and a few other New York artists were using non-art materials and processes similar to Nauman's; he saw reproductions of their sculptures in art magazines, along with works he admired by Jasper Johns and Richard Tuttle. None of his classmates were moving in this direction, though, and some of them thought Nauman was aesthetically challenged. Others were in awe of him. His most important teachers, the painters William Wiley and Wayne Thiebaud and the ceramic artist Robert

school—Judy was pretty and popular, Bruce was shy and serious—and started dating at the University of Wisconsin. Immediately after graduation they got married, mainly because, as Nauman explained, their parents would have been "very, very upset if we had gone to California together" without doing so.

Nauman's parents, Calvin and Genevieve, were solid, middle-class Midwesterners—Bruce was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana—with strong moral and ethical codes of behavior, which they imparted to

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Bruce and his two younger brothers, Craig and Larry. Their dependable but somewhat remote father was an engineer and a salesman for General Electric. His company kept moving him to different cities when the boys were growing up, so they went to several different schools. Bruce did well in all of them. Something of a loner, he was mainly interested in math and music—he took piano lessons as a child, switched to classical guitar, then to string bass. At the University of Wisconsin, he planned to major in physics, but, realizing that he lacked the passion for math that the best students seemed to have, he decided (“and it’s something I never quite understood—what made me think I could do that?”) that he was going to be an artist.

Reports of the strange-looking sculptures and films he was making at Davis got around. Nicholas Wilder, a young Los Angeles art dealer with an eye for new talent, saw one of Nauman’s fibreglass pieces and couldn’t get it out of his head. Wilder visited Nauman’s studio at Davis soon afterward, and eventually offered him a one-man show in the spring of 1966—something that now happens to young artists regularly but was almost unheard of then. Nothing sold, but a couple of the pieces appeared later that year in a group show called “Eccentric Abstraction,” at the Fischbach Gallery in New York. When he cleared out his Davis studio that spring, some fellow-students went through the Dumpster he’d used and pulled out the relatively intact pieces, which they held on to until he became famous.

Bruce and Judy moved to San Francisco, where they rented a former grocery store in the Mission District. Their living quarters were in back; the storefront became Nauman’s studio. He taught two days a week at the Art Institute of San Francisco, which provided health insurance. That helped, because their first child, Erik, had been born in August. His studio process, then and now, was to read and think until an idea took hold of him. He reread Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations” and John Cage’s writings on chance and contingency, both of which he had discovered in college, and he devoured Samuel Beckett’s novels and plays. “I was trying to understand what art is and what artists do,” he told me, “and a lot of that, for me, seemed to involve watching and waiting to see what would happen.

When I’m desperate enough just to do anything, even if it seems completely stupid, it’s such a relief.” In those days, he hoped that sooner or later he’d figure out how to make art without such a struggle, but it never happened. “My dad once said, ‘You don’t have to reinvent the wheel every day,’ but I think you do,” he told me. “Maybe not every day, but pretty often.”

The process, in any event, produced a torrent of work, some of it pretty silly. Nauman constructed and photographed a series of three-dimensional puns or word-plays: “Drill Team” consisted of five drill bits in graduated sizes, embedded in a block of wood; “Eating My Words” was Nauman poised over a plate containing pieces of bread shaped into letters of the alphabet. Others were more enigmatic, such as his wax cast of Judy’s hand, arm, shoulder, neck, jaw, and mouth, which he called “From Hand to Mouth.” He made a convex lead plaque with the inscription “A Rose Has No Teeth” (the phrase comes from Wittgenstein); it was to be affixed to the trunk of a tree, so that “after a few years the tree would grow over it, and it would be gone.” Judy, who knew better than to ask him about his work, assumed that a lot of it was Bruce being playful. “There was a lighthearted side to his personality,” she said recently. “I thought he didn’t take himself all that seriously, but I found out later that he did—very seriously.”

Nauman devised two window signs with messages that stretched irony to a higher level. One read “The True Artist Is an Amazing Luminous Fountain”; the other was “The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths.” Both were inspired by a neon sign for beer that had been left in the big plate-glass window of his studio when the New California Grocery moved out. The first, inscribed in large capitals on a sheet of transparent Mylar, echoed Nauman’s slightly earlier “Self-Portrait as a Fountain,” a photograph of himself, bare-chested, directing an arched spout of water through pursed lips. The photograph was a clear enough spoof of classical themes and garden ornaments. But “amazing” and “luminous”? He was kidding—wasn’t he? A similar uncertainty surrounds “Mystic Truths,” which Nauman did soon after visiting a Man Ray show at the Pasadena Museum. It is a five-foot-high “wall or window” piece that he designed and had executed in pink and blue neon tubing, in the spiral form of the

beer sign in his window. Nauman said he was interested then in making art that didn’t look like art, something that looked, in fact, like a commercial display. As he told Brenda Richardson, the curator at the Baltimore Museum, “In that case, you wouldn’t really notice it until you paid attention. Then, when you read it, you would have to think about it.” The piece, he told me, “was like a little test, to see if I believed it or not.” And did he believe it? I asked. “Probably not,” he said, smiling. “But then why not?” He got up and poured another two fingers of bourbon.

Leo Castelli, the New York dealer who represented Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, and several stars of the Pop generation, heard about Nauman from Richard Bellamy and other art-world insiders. In January, 1968, he gave him a solo show. There were almost no reviews—Robert Pincus-Witten, in *Artforum*, described the work as “adolescent and contemptible”—and few sales at the time (though everything sold eventually), but none of that mattered. Joining Castelli’s star-studded roster put Nauman, at the age of twenty-six, into the front ranks of contemporary art.

Nauman and his wife and son were spending that winter on the East Coast. The painter Paul Waldman, whom Nauman had met in San Francisco, had offered to let them use a house in Southampton that he owned jointly with Roy Lichtenstein, with strict instructions not to make any marks on the wall of the studio they had built in the back. “That’s when I got a video camera,” Nauman said. “Leo bought one of the first handheld video cameras for the gallery, and let me use it, and then Richard Serra had it.” He used the camera to record himself performing banal and repetitive activities in the studio, such as walking a square pattern “in an exaggerated manner.” Conceptual artists who made “installation” works on site, or gave instructions for others to make them, were opening an era of “post-studio art,” but for Nauman the studio was the place where he got his ideas and carried them out. One of his first audio works, done in 1968, consists of a small empty room with concealed speakers, through which his voice can be heard repeating, in tones that range from a plea to a snarl, “Get out of my mind, get out of this room.”

A crucial shift was taking place in

Nauman's work, from a focus on himself and his own body to a more direct engagement with the viewer. In a 1969 group exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York, soon after his return from his first trip to Europe, he showed "Performance Corridor," a narrow wood-and-wallboard construction that played perceptual tricks on people who ventured into it. He had made the corridor for a video piece in the Southampton studio, which showed him squeezing into it, and then realized that others could have the experience for themselves—but on his terms, not theirs. "I wanted them to do it my way," he explained. Nauman admired the revolutionary dance theatre of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, who used chance operations in composing sounds and movement, but he wasn't ready to do that in his own work. When asked by Johns to design a set for Cunningham's "Tread," though, he came up with an eminently Cagean solution: a row of industrial-size electric fans at stage front, blowing out toward the audience.

The New York sojourn had been highly rewarding, but Nauman had no inclination to stay there, or to become enmeshed in the intensely competitive New York art world. "I really needed to get away from that," he said. The city had whetted his ambition, however, and he didn't want to go back to San Francisco. "The San Francisco artists tended to be anti-intellectual and uptight," he said. "A lot of energy went into hating New York and Los Angeles."

The Naumans went to Los Angeles, where they settled in Pasadena, in a large, rambling, shingle-style house that belonged to Walter Hopps, a curator who had a habit of getting fired from one museum after another. Hopps didn't live in the house, and he liked to let artists stay there. (The Naumans paid seventy-five dollars a month.) An artist named Richard Jackson and his girlfriend, Christine Langras, were living in another part of it when the Naumans arrived, and the four of them became friends. Although Nauman kept his distance from the L.A. art scene, he took on some protective coloration during the nine years he lived there. He wore cowboy shirts and Stetsons from Nudie's Rodeo Tailor. Ileana Sonnabend, his Paris dealer and Castelli's ex-wife, owed him a substantial sum for European sales, so he got her to buy him a classic

Ferrari. His work was selling for up to ten thousand dollars, and he supplemented his income with teaching jobs. "I paid attention to how the art market worked," he said. "I wasn't blindly bumping along. If you were a New York artist, you got more attention. Being in L.A., I needed to be a little tougher, a little meaner." During this period, Judy Nauman began to question her role in the marriage. With feminism gaining ground, she was less content to settle for being a housewife and mother, or to accept the emotional distance that her husband seemed to require. "My feelings are in my work," he told her. The birth of their second child, Zoë, in 1970, brought additional strains. Bruce was a supportive husband and an attentive father, she said, but "he was an artist first."

Nauman continued to produce a lot of new work—more corridor pieces, videos, flashing neon signs that conflated punning wordplays: "Raw War," "Eat/Death," "Run from Fear, Fun from Rear." His work found fewer buyers in the U.S. than in Europe, where Nauman's anti-formal objects had precedents in the work of Joseph Beuys and the Italian Arte Povera movement; at home, their rude intensity made people uncomfortable. Artists, though, took note of everything he did, and so did several museum curators.

In 1972, at the age of thirty-one, he had a major retrospective. It opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, travelled to the Whitney, and went on to tour four European museums. The show was almost certainly premature. Hilton Kramer dismissed it in the *Times* as "pretty cold stuff, and pretty boring" in its slavish adherence to "Duchampian territory." In fact, Nauman had never thought much about Duchamp. While he agrees that Duchamp's influence was impossible to ignore, he says it got to him secondhand, filtered through the Duchamp-influenced work of Man Ray, John Cage, and Jasper Johns.

The 1972 retrospective lasted into 1974 and stopped Nauman in his tracks—a fairly common experience for artists, who often find it hard to move forward after such an effort of looking back. He couldn't work for several months. "It had never happened to me before," he said, "so I was trying to figure out if I had to find a different career. I was having such terrible stomach pains that I went to the emer-

gency room. The doctor said, 'Well, try Tums.'" Nauman, whose reticence masks acute sensitivity, was more vulnerable than people realized. The first important pieces he made after the dry period were "Double Steel Cage Piece," a steel-mesh room set inside a slightly larger steel-mesh enclosure—viewers could enter the outer cage but not the inner one—and "Consummate Mask of Rock," a sculptural installation of sixteen limestone cubes in two sizes, plus a typewritten text, taped to the wall, that was based on the child's game Rock, Paper, Scissors. Really a long poem, the text includes these lines: "This is my mask of fidelity to truth and life./This is to cover the mask of pain and desire./This is to mask the cover of need for human companionship," and then, farther along, "PEOPLE DIE OF EXPOSURE."

The Naumans' marriage came apart in the mid-seventies. "I needed something that he just couldn't provide," Judy said recently. "I left the marriage emotionally, and then he left. It took him a long time, but when he decided, the door was shut." She eventually remarried and had another child. By then, Bruce was living with Harriet Lindenberg, Zoë's kindergarten teacher at a Quaker school south of Pasadena. "I asked him to dinner," Lindenberg remembers. "It would never have happened if I hadn't. He was painfully shy."

Lindenberg was a vivid, independent, sometimes irresistible force. Born in San Antonio, she had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Latin America, and was passionate about social and political issues. Nauman, who told me he had been "barely aware of the Vietnam War, because I was too focussed on wanting to be an artist," was impressed. Lindenberg had no idea what Nauman did at the time she asked him to dinner, and no interest in getting married. They lived together for more than ten years. It was Harriet who persuaded him to leave California and move to New Mexico, in 1979. Her brother lived in Santa Fe, and she knew about Pecos, a village about thirty miles to the east, from an old friend in the Peace Corps. "Bruce was very resistant at first," she recalls. "He said he was an urban artist, that he'd shrivel up and die in the country, but then he adjusted quicker than I did." They bought a "funky little cabin that Bruce added on to himself," Lindenberg said, and got someone to build a studio for Nauman just up the

road. She took a teaching job in Santa Fe. Zoë came to live with them soon after, when she was ten. Her mother's second marriage had failed, and she was having a difficult time raising three children alone. Two years later, Erik moved there, too. Harriet became a highly involved step-mother. "I was a little afraid of her at first," Erik remembers. "She was quite emotional, the opposite of Dad. But it was good to have someone who tried to get us to talk about things, which my dad certainly didn't."

Nauman's reputation had been in decline ever since the retrospective. Producing relatively few works and being so far removed from the New York art world had a lot to do with it, and his distaste for self-promotion didn't help. For several years, he subsisted mainly on his two-hundred-dollar-a-month stipend from Castelli (paid against future sales). At one point, he felt so discouraged that he thought seriously about turning his avocation—forging handmade knives—into a real business. ("I never sold enough to pay for the material.") Nauman, whose art does without fine craftsmanship, has a very high regard for it in his personal effects—knives, hats, boots, saddles, cars.

In the early eighties, he began a series of large sculptures with political overtones. "South America Triangle" (1981), his first overtly political work, had a cast-iron chair hanging upside down inside a suspended steel triangle. This grim image referred to methods of political torture he had read about in the work of V. S. Naipaul, and also in a book by the Argentine journalist Jacobo Timerman, which Harriet had told him about. Increasingly, his frustration and anger over what was happening in South Africa and Latin America, and over the way people treated one another in general, became an inspiration for new work.

The anger came out more directly in the neon-tube sculptures he did in those years. "American Violence" (1981-82), shaped like a swastika, has short, rude phrases, like "STICK IT IN YOUR EAR," that flash on and off in vivid colors. "One Hundred Live and Die" is a ten-foot-tall tower of alternating multicolored three-word commands, such as "LOVE AND LIVE," "HATE AND DIE," "FUCK AND DIE." These vivid, startlingly gorgeous constructions progressed to animated neon displays, some quite large, whose

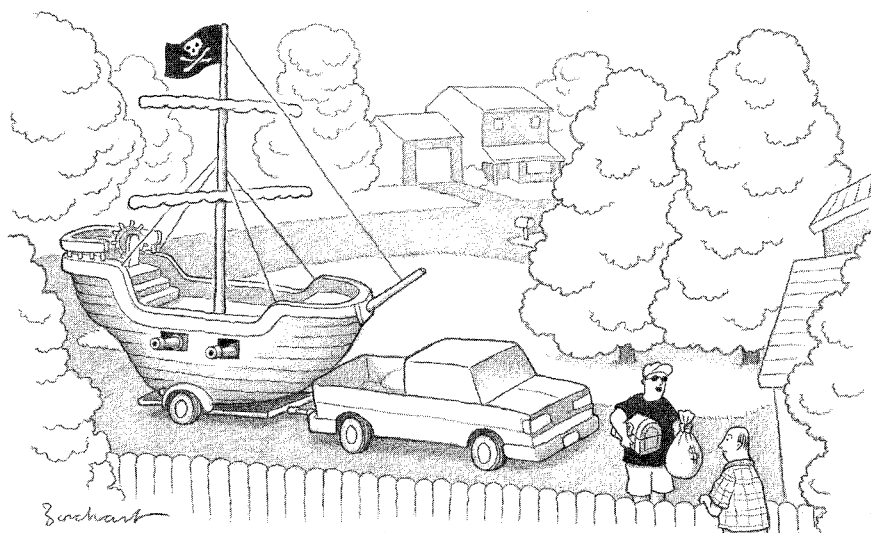
moving images featured group sex, masturbation, aggressive insults, and death by hanging. He also produced several new videos, his first since 1973. Made with the help of a video editor in New York named Dennis Diamond, these were longer and more complex than his earlier ones, and their content was considerably more disturbing: a domestic spat that escalated into a double homicide ("Violent Incident") and, in his "Clown Torture" series, the agonies and humiliations of circus clowns. For some Nauman admirers, myself among them, to watch a fully costumed clown saying "No, no, no" in every conceivable inflection and intonation, and ending up writhing on the floor, screaming the word in terror, is more punishment than we probably need. When they were shown at the 1989 Whitney Biennial, a shocked visitor stood outside the room for quite a while, warning people not to go in.

The scatological nastiness in some of Nauman's work in the eighties put a lot of viewers off, but the new work, which coincided with a booming art market, revived his reputation. Museums here and abroad showed the videos and neons, reviewers praised them, and American as well as European collectors bought them. None of this disturbed the even tenor of Nauman's personal life, where emotions of any sort rarely surfaced. Harriet Lindenberg saw him get really angry once, soon after they moved to Pecos; a telephone argument with the man who was building his studio made him so furious that he drove his right fist through a wall, breaking a finger. Nothing like that ever hap-

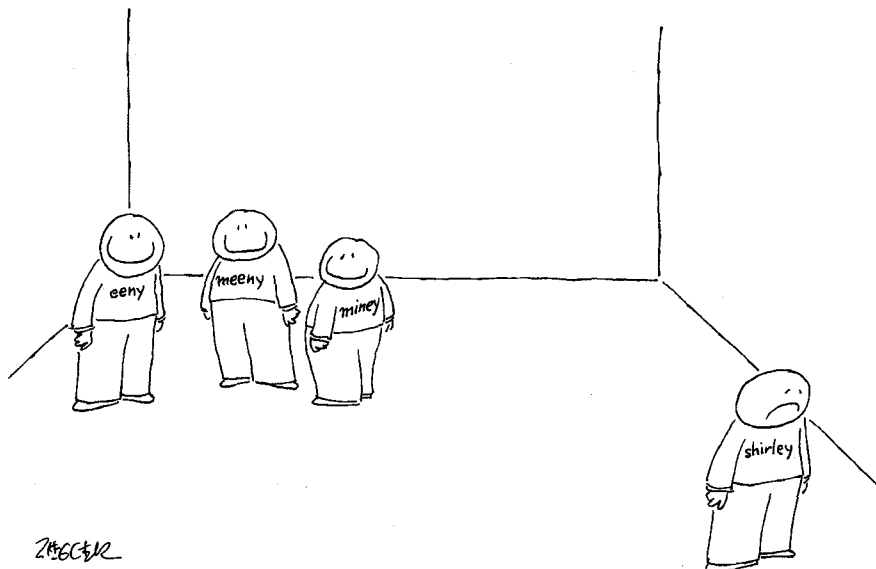
pened again. His feelings went into his work, but soon after the wall-punching incident he got interested in horses, and his life changed in deep and subtle ways.

Before dinner at the Naumans' house one evening, we watched a videotape of Ray Hunt working with horses. Hunt was a professional trainer who travelled around the West, giving clinics. By the mid-nineteen-eighties, Nauman had acquired two saddle horses of his own. "I'd heard about Ray Hunt," he said. "I took my horses up to Farmington, Colorado, where he was doing a clinic. Watching Ray was kind of like a Zen experience. Western horsemanship can be pretty rough, but his idea is that if the horse isn't afraid there's no problem. To get along with your horse, you have to give up trying to be in charge. You have to get to be where the horse is." People have known this for millennia; Xenophon talks about it in "The Art of Horsemanship." Watching the tape of Hunt, on foot, working with a horse that had never been ridden, using just a loose rope to persuade him, very gently, to turn in one direction or another, was mesmerizing—a lesson in converting fear into trust. "Ray didn't give you an inch," Nauman said. "You had to pay attention every minute. His teaching really had to do with how you lead your life."

Nauman now spends nearly as much time working with his horses as he does in his studio, and in his mind the two activities are related. When he was making the "Clown Torture" videos, in 1987, he would hand a simple scenario to the performer and let him (or her) improvise. This was a long way from the tight con-



"You'd be amazed how quickly a boat like that pays for itself."



trol he'd maintained over his corridor pieces. "I don't know if there's a connection, but I started to give up control when I was learning about horses," he said. "I think the work got richer."

He went to several more clinics with Hunt over the years, and the two men, in their nonverbal way, became friends. A week after I'd been to Galisteo, Nauman e-mailed me, saying, "Ray Hunt died yesterday." In another e-mail, an hour later, remembering his first visit to Hunt's clinic, he wrote, "Going home to Pecos I was a few miles out of Farmington and had to stop—was teared up and had to get out and touch my horses—tell them I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Susan Rothenberg, who was born in Buffalo, moved to New York City in 1969, two years after she graduated from the Fine Arts School at Cornell. Gregarious and a bit wild, she hung out at Max's Kansas City, met dozens of artists, musicians, and dancers, explored other media, took dance classes, married the sculptor George Trakas, and had a child with him in 1972. Two years later, doodling on a small canvas, she drew the outline of a horse divided down the middle by a vertical line. The image, which came out of nowhere, led to the paintings that made her famous: spectral horses embedded in abstract, densely worked backgrounds, mysterious images that carried a strong emotional charge. They were key works in what would come to be known, in a 1978 group show at the Whitney, as "New Image Painting."

Like most of her artist friends, Rothenberg had followed Nauman's work for years. They'd met a few times, at art events, and they met again at a New York dinner party for Nauman in October, 1988. Rothenberg was no longer married and had just ended a relationship with a Hungarian banker. Harriet Lindenberg had recently broken up with Nauman. The hostess, Angela Westwater, whose New York gallery, Sperone Westwater, had started to represent both Nauman and Rothenberg, seated them together. A day or so later, Nauman called Rothenberg and invited her to lunch. He went to a party at her apartment the next week, and stayed on afterward—stayed for several days. He had to go back to Pecos, but returned to New York in a hurry, and three months after that they were married.

Nauman offered to move to New York, but "I didn't want him to give up New Mexico and the horses, and New York wasn't really calling to me," Rothenberg said. A lot of her artist friends had moved away, and, besides, she was deeply in love. ("It was a shock, at forty-four, to feel that kind of emotional intensity, and know it was mutual.") They commuted for the next year and a half, until Rothenberg's daughter, Maggie, finished high school, and then Rothenberg packed up and moved to their unfinished house near Galisteo. The marriage was something the art world rarely sees: two major talents working at a very high level, without competition or interference.

Her painting changed in the high-desert country. "Colors," she said. "Ani-

mals. Brighter palette. Different points of view, looking down at things and up at things." She painted a strange portrait of Bruce, called "Blue U-Turn," a deep-blue, male-ish ellipse. As a wedding present, she had given him the first horse painting she ever did, in 1974; it hangs in their living room. Nauman gave her a horse, a Spanish barb called Cece, and the horse image, gone from her work for several years, returned in a new form. She tried to enjoy riding, for his sake, but, she said, "I was never really comfortable up there," and eventually she stopped. "I'm a walker, not a rider."

Nauman's work also changed. He had found he could buy, on the Internet, ready-made polyurethane forms that taxidermists use to stretch animal skins over. These ghostly, featureless animal shapes became the basis of a series of new sculptures: animal pyramids; dismembered and reassembled hybrids; carousels with dangling animal forms whose feet or hindquarters scraped the floor as they revolved. He made bronze casts of human hands, paired in expressive positions and gestures, and casts of the heads of people he knew—the heads were often suspended on wires, some of them upside down, or in embarrassingly close proximity to each other. Because he didn't remove the marks and imperfections of the casting process, the heads have a rough look that makes them seem vaguely threatening. A similar unease pervades the videos he made with Rinde Eckert, a singer and performance artist, who also posed for many of the heads, and it reaches a near-unbearable pitch in "Shit in Your Hat—Head on a Chair," a video installation in which a female mime attempts, with increasing distress, to act out inane, rapid-fire commands she's being given by an offscreen voice.

The full range of Nauman's power to disturb was laid out in a 1994 retrospective, his second, organized by the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, in Washington, D.C. The exhibition, which also appeared at the Reina Sofía, in Madrid, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, predictably polarized critical opinion. "I think he is the best—the essential—American artist of the last quarter-century," Peter Schjeldahl, an early supporter, wrote in *Art in America*. *Time's* Robert Hughes called the work "so dumb that you can't guess whether its

dumbness is genuine or feigned,” although he glumly conceded that “Nauman, beyond much dispute, is the most influential American artist of his generation.” More radically than anyone else, Nauman had led the way out of Minimal art’s austerity and into the new world of scorched-earth freedom, with its endless pitfalls and opportunities, and he had done so in near-total isolation from art-world politics and promotions. He had even conquered the art market. The French collector François Pinault paid \$9.9 million in 2001 for “Henry Moore Bound to Fail,” his 1967 wax-over-plaster sculpture of his own back with his arms bound. Nauman had outdistanced criticism.

He retreated to his studio after the retrospective, to read and think. The dry spell this time was a long one—Rothenberg says it lasted two or three years. He took care of his horses, and rode one or more of them every day, unless the weather was too bad. Now and then, Rothenberg tried to get him to talk about his block. “The answer was always ‘Don’t know,’” she said. “I used to get so mad at his inability to communicate, but that stopped around three years ago. I went to a shrink for a while, and then we both went, and the shrink lost interest in me. The shrink still calls Bruce about every three months, and leaves a message asking if there’s anything he’d like to talk about, but Bruce doesn’t call back. I’ve finally realized I don’t need to know the stuff Bruce is unable to tell me. I think we love each other very much. There have only been three women in his life, and he’s never been alone for more than a few months. I’m very satisfied with him, and very happy living about ninety-two per cent of my life by myself. I don’t think I’ll ever know Bruce, but he’s mine, and he’s a beauty.”

One day in 2000, sitting in his studio, Nauman began to wonder what happened there at night, when he wasn’t present. He had a video camera with infrared capacity, which he set up in one corner and turned on before he went to bed that night. When he looked at the footage the next morning, he saw that quite a lot had happened. Moths flitted by, leaving momentary white streaks. Mice scurried in and out, their tiny eyes flashing red as they caught the light. Coyotes howled, far off. The studio cat appeared, sat down, wandered off again; once or twice the cat and a mouse were in the

picture at the same time, but they ignored each other—there had been an infestation of mice in the studio that year, Nauman explained, and the cat had caught so many that he’d lost interest. For many nights over the next couple of months, Nauman deployed his camera in seven different studio locations, and put the footage together to make a film lasting nearly six hours. “Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage),” as he called it—the reference was to Cage’s use of chance methods—was shown at the Dia Center for the Arts, in New York, for six months in 2002. Plenty of people found it excruciatingly boring, but plenty more stayed for hours, gliding around in the wheeled office chairs that Nauman had asked the gallery to provide. “If you tried to watch it, you missed out,” Nauman said. “You just had to wander through and let it work.” He also made, at Rothenberg’s suggestion, an “all-action edit,” showing only the footage with moths, mice, or cat, and lasting about half an hour.

Two years later, in 2004, invited to do a temporary installation in Turbine Hall, the colossal entrance plaza of the Tate Modern in London, Nauman created a sound environment. He used twenty-two soundtracks from his videos and sound pieces over the past forty years, an aural retrospective that enthralled and shook up large numbers of visitors, and provided both the model and the audio technology for his “Days/Giorni” installations in Venice.

On one of the afternoons I spent with Nauman, he told me about Lennie Tristano, a blind jazz pianist he used to listen to in Los Angeles in the nineteen-seventies. Tristano had played with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and other jazz legends. Nauman handed me a pair of earphones and cued a Tristano recording on his laptop. The man’s style was fast and driving. “He doesn’t lead you into it, he just starts and goes,” Nauman said admiringly. “At one point, I wanted my work to have that kind of immediate impact, just being there, all at once.” When I asked if he still wanted that, he thought a bit, and said, “No. Maybe sometimes. It’s as though, earlier, there was an intention, and as the work’s gotten more spread out there’s more waiting to see what will happen.” Nauman’s recent work did seem less harsh and more meditative than it used to

be, I suggested; did this mean that the level of anger and frustration had subsided? He considered the question. “I don’t think I operate out of that anymore,” he said, “and I don’t think I did when I was younger. That was more during the eighties, and it was about the larger world—although there was also some frustration with the art world.” I asked him whether, after forty years of thinking about what art was and could be, he’d come any closer to an answer. “I have enough trouble working that I don’t think about that as much,” he said quietly.

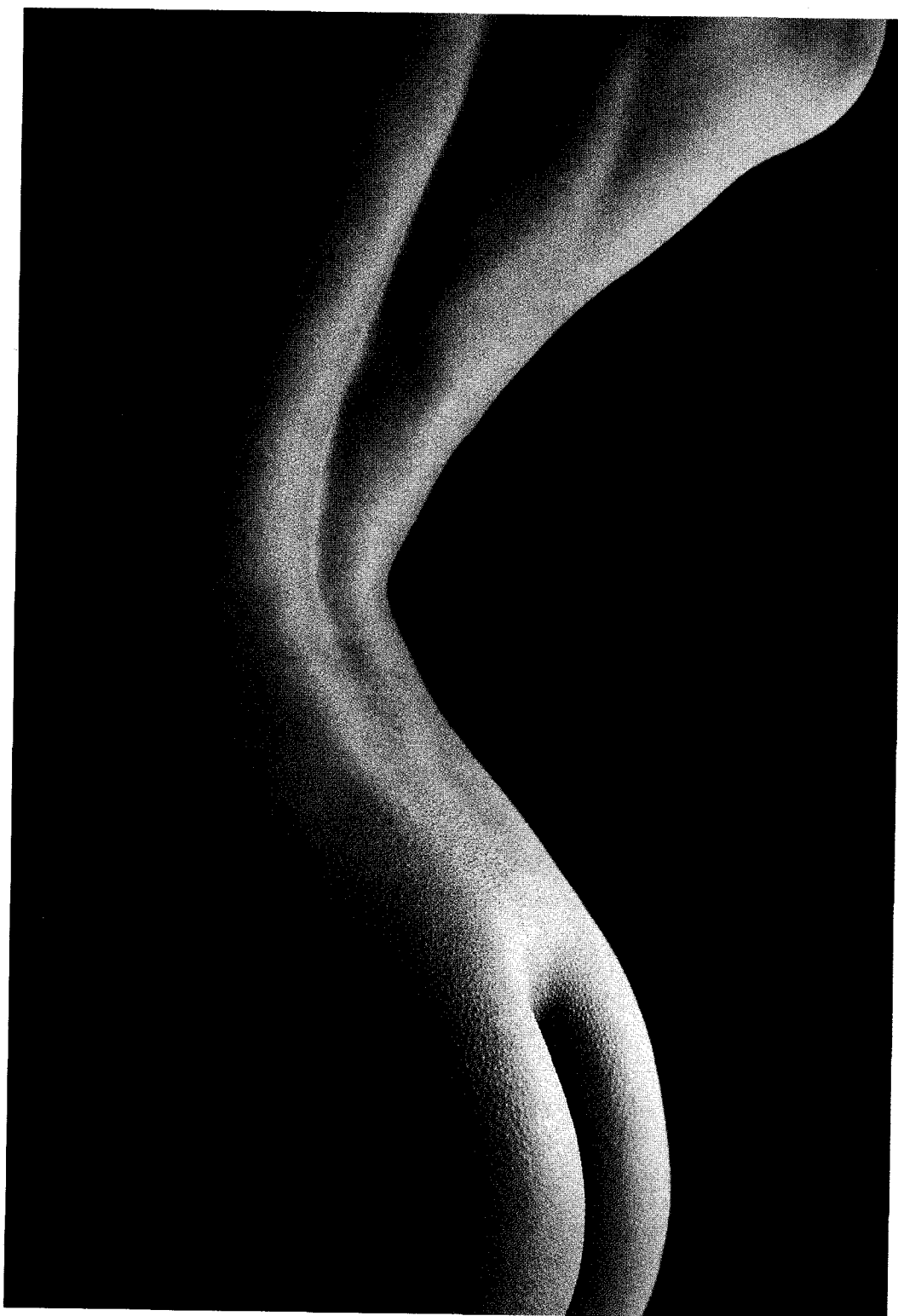
The Naumans come to New York fairly frequently. They keep a small penthouse apartment in the East Eighties, and a year ago they bought an 1830 house on the Lower East Side, which they are currently renovating. It will have studio space for both of them, and they will be able to spend more time with Rothenberg’s daughter, Maggie, an artist who lives in New York, and with Nauman’s son, Erik, who lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two children and teaches at the Hewitt School in Manhattan. (Zoë Nauman, a photographer, is in Oakland, California, where she helps her husband run a combined bar and motorcycle-repair shop.) Because of the horses and the dogs, Bruce and Susan probably won’t spend much time in New York for the next few years. Susan, breezing in from her afternoon outing with the three dogs, said their plan was “to wait until the dogs die, and Bruce makes up his mind about the horses. In five years we’ll know what we’re doing.”

Two small drawings of a strange-looking head were pinned to the wall of Nauman’s studio. “I’ve been thinking for a couple of years about self-portrait drawings,” he explained, when I asked about them. The idea came to him after seeing a number of Rembrandt self-portraits in a show at the Metropolitan Museum, but, of course, being Nauman, he couldn’t just start drawing his face in the mirror. Instead, he rescued, from a pile of stuff on the studio floor, a mold he’d used years earlier for a wax male head (not his own) and hung it up to use as a model. It was the reverse image of a face—if you poured plaster into it, the correct image would emerge. “I haven’t really drawn at all for two years,” he explained. “It’s a drawing exercise, to get myself back in shape. This is a tough thing to try and draw, because it’s a reverse image. So I’ve set myself a difficult problem.” ♦

FICTION

LOVE AFFAIR WITH SECONDARIES

BY CRAIG RAINE



Piotr was forty-two, married to Basia, the father of three sons, a professor of English at the Instytut Anglistyki at the University of Krakow. Three things worried him.

First, he was having an affair with Agnieszka, the poetess, who wore spectacles and looked like Nana Mouskouri.

Second, he had recently undergone a series of tests to establish whether he had inherited the family's predisposition to die of cancer in the late forties, as his mother had done.

And, third, his blond eyebrows, always strongly marked, had gone Nietzschean almost overnight. They were the family eyebrows, his father's eyebrows—two intense pelts, half an inch high, that made him look middle-aged. His older brother, Czeslaw, the architect, had an identical pair, but he was fifty.

There was to be a fourth thing, but as yet he knew nothing of it.

The affair with Agnieszka bothered him not because he felt guilty about Basia, his wife—though he did feel guilty—but because Agnieszka's poetry was notorious for its candor and explicitness. Every year produced a new slim volume in which the slimness was inversely proportionate to the indiscretion. Piotr wrote poetry himself, less prolifically and more guardedly. He had written poems about his affair with Agnieszka, but his way with pathetic fallacy meant that even Basia could read them without guessing their true provenance. The nearest he had come to confessional poetry was a dramatic monologue titled "Peter the Great to His Courtesan"—in which the Tsar forbade his mistress to "rust his sword" and issued other majestically obscure imperatives.

Agnieszka's poetry, though, had her taking off her horn-rims to kiss her lover in the Kool Kats Jazz Club or giving a blow job on the back seat of the bus to Nowa Huta. And her titles were nearly always dates and places.

One day he expected to read a poem about his eyebrows. Or a poem with his phone number or his address in the title: "Ul. Sienkiewicza 35 m.5." Especially since his apartment was often the easiest place for the lovers to meet—as they were going to meet on this rainy day in June. He wasn't teaching that afternoon, because his students had exams. Agnieszka walked from the nearby Film School, where she worked in the cataloguing de-

partment. His sons would be in school till four, and Basia, who worked for a foreign press agency, was never home before six o'clock, because of the time difference.

As soon as Agnieszka arrived, Piotr put the chain on the door, and the pair undressed quickly and silently on opposite sides of the sofa bed. Like a married couple in a cold room. But the thick curve of his erection was ready before they even touched. He could smell her genitals across the tartan blanket—the blanket with tell-tail tassels which she always brought in her tote bag.

She took off her spectacles.

On the sofa bed, she seldom repeated herself. This particular afternoon, as her features warped with pleasure, Piotr heard her agonized whisper, "I want to, aah, push your stiff red, aah, into another woman's . . ." And he came, too.

Afterward, they talked, always about the same thing—Piotr's postcoital desire to end the affair and Agnieszka's passionate opposition. "We are like mayflies. We live only for an afternoon, and we must take whatever joy is given us." This was the argument she always urged.

Piotr thought of the tests he had undergone—the barium meals, the endoscopies, the soreness of his throat after tubes had been pushed down it, the yellow bruise in the crook of his arm where blood had been taken. But there was also something comic in her chosen image for man's transience—the indestructible trope of the doomed mayfly. And he thought of the character in Chekhov's "Ivanov" who says that mankind is like a flower in a field. Along comes a goat—no more flower. The earpieces of Agnieszka's spectacles, he noticed, were arranged around a bottle of Basia's perfume, brought back from England by her sister. Je Reviens.

And then he heard the *shhpp* of Basia's key in the lock. The chain was in place, and the snib of the lock was also depressed, so that the apartment door couldn't be opened from the outside. *Shhpp*. There was a faint jingle of keys as Basia checked she was using the right one. *Shhpp. Shhpp*.

Piotr laid his finger against his lips—and smelled the rankness of Agnieszka's genitals. He leaned toward her, shaking his head vigorously when she tried to kiss him. "No," he whispered in her ear. "She'll go away in a minute. Just wait quietly.

Then you can leave." They listened to the sibilance, not even daring to dress. A minute passed. Neither of them heard Basia's steps descending the concrete stairs. Piotr found himself listening for the terse resonance of the steel bannister when it was slapped.

Shhpp. "Shit." Then, raising her voice, "Piotr, are you in there?"

Basia began to thump on the door. After only a minute, the hammering stopped, and they heard the voice of the old woman in the apartment below. "He's there with that woman he brings. It's disgusting. You should get a divorce."

"You should mind your own fucking business," Basia yelled. "Piotr, open the bloody door, you shit."

They began to get dressed. The shoulders of Agnieszka's raincoat were still dark from the rain. She tightened the belt and looked at Piotr. He was folding away the sofa bed.

"Deny it," he whispered. "Say we weren't doing anything, but it looked bad, so we kept quiet. In case she came to the wrong conclusion."

Agnieszka shook her head. "No. It's fate, Piotr. Tell her that you love me. That you're leaving her." But she was pale.

"I can't."

Agnieszka wound up her lipstick, applied its apricot shimmer with a surprisingly steady hand, turned up the collar of her raincoat, and went to open the door. "I am not going to discuss our love with her. My conscience is clear. And yours should be, too. I'm going home. How could something so beautiful between us, something so noble, be touched by something so grubby? So undignified?"

The door opened, but there was no sign of Basia, only the head of the old woman, at floor level, staring up through the bars like a criminal.

Agnieszka stepped out and received an almighty crack to the side of her head from the handle of Basia's red umbrella. The old woman applauded. Agnieszka did not collapse. She held on to the ochre bannister with both hands, leaning forward, as if she were keeping it at arm's length. Her mouth opened and shut, opened and shut. Tears brimmed in her eyes.

Piotr was amazed to find himself noticing the sleeve belts on her raincoat—how they gathered the cuffs, *like Christmas crackers*.

Without saying a word, or even acknowledging Basia's existence, Agnieszka walked slowly down the stairs.

To Piotr's gradual surprise, Agnieszka made no attempt to contact him after she was hit on the side of the head with the rosewood handle of Basia's umbrella.

What did he expect? Obviously, she couldn't phone him at home. He thought that she would phone him at work. Even if there was no one else in the common room—marking papers or drying shoes at the wall heater—he would adopt his customary neutral tone. His responses would be inconsequential. To her question “Why can't you meet me on Friday night?,” he would answer, “No, I don't think it's arrived yet.” Or she would ask, “Do you want to fuck me?” And he'd reply, “Not all the work has been completed yet, but yes, as far as I know, that's the case.” He thought this strategy might help to contain her outrage.

But Agnieszka didn't phone. He could, of course, phone her. In some ways, that would be better, because she shared an office at the Film School with only one other colleague, an older, divorced woman whom she'd taken into her confidence. The truth was that Piotr was afraid of her anger at his timidity, at the way he had stood to one side—silent in the curious silence after the blow. That curt, wordless, forceful *dak*.

Perhaps, he reasoned, she didn't wish to add to the pressure he was under? It was unlikely: Agnieszka had no way of knowing that Basia had summoned the entire family to a discussion of his infidelity.

And, in any case, Agnieszka's consideration for others wasn't often evident. It wasn't selfishness but, rather, a principled egoism. She believed in the truth of her emotions. The important thing was not to live a lie. Other people, consideration for other people, putting their feelings first, inevitably meant putting your own feelings second. Hell is other people, Sartre said. But Agnieszka's conviction was unrelated to existentialist ideas of inauthenticity and *mauvaise foi*. She could imagine telling a lie in order to live in the truth.

The concept of “poetic truth” appealed to her—the idea of something not literally true but nevertheless ideally true. The slow thistledown of stars, for example, their drift and cling, was something that struck her with renewed force whenever she removed

her spectacles—and was looking over a lover's shoulder at the Milky Way. Her favorite poet was Marina Tsvetayeva.

A week passed before she finally telephoned—to tell Piotr that the blow delivered by the umbrella handle had produced first a lump, expected by Agnieszka and therefore unsurprising, and then a tumor. Which was aggressive, according to the doctor. She had wanted to be quite certain before she telephoned. That was why she'd waited. Her voice was steady and her tone factual.

Piotr stared up at the institute ceiling, with its elaborate nineteenth-century moldings and the Greek islands of damp. He could see nothing for the pulsing blackness that shrouded his vision. He was finding it difficult to breathe. There was no saliva in his mouth.

“Piotr?”

When he tried to speak, he could manage only a whisper. “Agnieszka.” Her name in his mouth sounded like the scratch of a fountain pen.

“I can't hear you.”

“I was saying your name.” He began to breathe at last, but his voice was unsteady.

“Tell me what happened.”

“You *know* what happened.”

“At the doctor's.”

“He says I should expect secondaries. It will metastasize.”

“So is there going to be surgical intervention? Radium? Or chemo? What tests did he run?”

There was a long pause. “No. It's hopeless, he says. A death sentence.”

“See another doctor. Agnieszka, you've got to see another doctor.”

“I want to die. There's nothing to live for now.”

Piotr was shocked to find himself more worried about his wife than about Agnieszka. Somewhere in his mind, he already thought of it as a vindictive tumor. And he wanted to know if Agnieszka had been to the police, whether his wife might be facing some kind of criminal charge, and how exactly it would be framed. But he did not dare ask directly, in case he put the idea in her head.

“I have to see you,” he said in a low voice, without thinking, as if there were someone else in the empty common room.

“Only if you spend the rest of my life with me.”

“The arrangements for that shipment

will require detailed advance planning,” he said.

“Is there someone there?” she asked.

“That is the correct state of affairs. The arrangements for that shipment—”

Agnieszka hung up with a clatter. And she didn't telephone again.

Basia was frying chicken livers and onions in the tiny kitchen when he told her about Agnieszka's tumor. She kept her back to him as he stood in the doorway. These days she seldom glanced in his direction, much less looked him in the eye. She took a pinch of salt with her right hand, rubbed a trickle into the pan, and beat her hands clean like a pair of cymbals.

“I'd take it with a pinch of salt, that tumor of hers.”

“Basia, I have to see her.”

“See her.”

On the wet chopping board, a few bloody shreds, seasoned flour with a red sticky edge.

“She might go to the police,” he said.

“Or a lawyer, more likely. See her. Find out.”

“You don't believe her, do you?”

“Doesn't matter either way. Whether she's lying. Which she is. Or if it's the truth, in which case she'll die before the case is settled.”

“What if it's a criminal case? What if it isn't a civil action?”

“Lay the table.”

Basia was tempted to tell Piotr about her own lover.

Just to balance the hurt. But she ate without lifting her eyes from the plate.

The reason Basia never told Piotr about her lover was that by then they were no longer lovers. Witold had found someone else—a man. Also Basia was deeply persuaded by her own inherent disposition toward fidelity. Fidelity, as she perceived it, wasn't something literal and pedantic. It was a fundamental mental posture, the essential truth. More, her righteous indignation with Piotr would be compromised if she indulged her instinct for revenge and sexual counterstrike. As it was, she could count on everyone's sympathy.

The family conference about Piotr's infidelity took place one Sunday afternoon in his brother Czeslaw's new apartment on the outskirts of Warsaw. It was also the architect's fifty-first birth-

day. The seal on the frosted bottle of Zubrowka was broken with a click—of plectrum on fingernail. Piotr thought of Agnieszka performing her poems, with her head bent over her guitar like a nursing mother. He listened, reproved, to the rustle, the sigh of the foil cap and the single *tut-tut* it took to pour a glass. Soon the white carved wooden tray would hold eight squat glasses—their clarity iced to ground glass—which would leave broken links of damp on the wood.

Fuck all this pathetic fucking pathetic fallacy, Piotr thought.

Czeslaw hadn't yet put up curtains. On the twentieth floor they hardly seemed essential. Piotr looked down at the builders' rubble and the canopy of cow parsley flourishing between the blocks of new flats. He turned back to the room for the birthday toast.

The vodka made for frankness. Basia's parents sat in their coats. Her father looked down and turned his flat cap to the right like a steering wheel. They were both hurt and surprised by his behavior. They would find it hard to forgive him.

"I find it hard to forgive myself," Piotr said.

"You've behaved like a complete shit," his mother-in-law said.

"You can't be harder on me than I am on myself."

"Anyone can be sorry," his mother-in-law said. "But the damage is done now. Saying sorry won't mend anything. What's that supposed to mean? *Sorry*."

"His eczema's back on his legs. That's what it means." It was Basia, defending him against her parents. He looked up gratefully, but she wouldn't meet his eyes. She was stern, yet in a strange way looked more vulnerable than usual. Younger. Touching.

Piotr realized that she wasn't wearing eye makeup.

He felt outmaneuvered. Clean shaven. Normal. Criminal. Why had he agreed to this ludicrous show trial?

"What we want to know, isn't it, is what he intends to do about it." It was his mother-in-law again.

Piotr wondered why Basia's mother never mentioned the time—almost twenty years ago now, at a New Year's party—when she had kissed her future son-in-law and put her tongue in his mouth. He had been standing with his arms folded outside the bathroom when she came out, saw him,

kissed him expertly, then rejoined the party. Piotr hadn't been in the least surprised, actually. They were drunk, but it wasn't a drunken kiss. It had seemed perfectly natural—proper, even—an acknowledgment of an ordinary fact. It was never repeated, never alluded to, written off by both as an alcoholic indiscretion. But the eidetic spark of mutual attraction had been there for the first five years of his marriage and had only gradually faded. They used to get on well, Piotr and his mother-in-law.

Edward, Piotr's younger, unmarried brother, said nothing. His sister, Nadia, also said nothing. She had parted from her husband over a similar affair and sat there like a reproach and a warning.

Piotr's father and Czeslaw spoke of the temptation, the *vanity* of the male. Piotr knew that they were defending him, but their generic argument offended his sense of individuality. He wasn't flattered by the gift of Agnieszka's youth and beauty. It wasn't his vanity that drove him—it was his mortality. He didn't want to remain young. He wanted to be alive before he died. That was all.

"The kid's told me how sorry he is," Czeslaw concluded. "And I think that's pretty obvious. He doesn't want to risk losing Basia and the kids. They're the most important thing in his life. He knows that."

And Czeslaw put his arm around Piotr's shoulders. "A toast. A toast to Piotr and Basia."

But later, walking in the wasteland between the new apartment blocks, Czeslaw was less friendly. "You stupid cunt. What the fuck did you think you were doing, you prick?" The elder brother dressing down the younger. They faced each other. Czeslaw tore the cigarette out of Piotr's mouth. "*Smoking*. Why are you fucking smoking? You are so stupid. You don't fucking smoke."

"You made my lip bleed." Piotr touched

his lower lip and looked at his finger.

"I don't give a fuck about your fucking lip." Czeslaw threw the cigarette on the grass and ground it to pieces.

Both men were slightly breathless, as if they had been running up stairs. Piotr wondered why Czeslaw was so angry.

"For fuck's sake! Putting everything at risk. Your whole fucking life for a fucking fuck. I can't fucking believe it. In your own fucking house. Jesus."

Piotr could smell cheese on Czeslaw's breath. He wanted to cry. He wasn't sure he could trust himself to speak.

"O.K.," he said. "I'll try to explain." But his voice kept vanishing. "The tests I had. Because of Ma." He shook his head. His eyes looked up to the right. His mouth stretched.

"Take it easy, Piotr. Easy now." There were tears in Czeslaw's voice, too.

"The point is. The point is. Shit. With her. I just think about her. Her cunt." He was staring at Czeslaw's lavish tie knot. "I want to live, you know. Before I die. And she understands that." Piotr looked up and met his brother's gray eyes under the tangle of eyebrows. "Agnieszka says we're like mayflies. We only live for an afternoon."

Something changed in Czeslaw's eyes. A point of light.

"I don't know whether I should tell you this, our kid." Czeslaw pushed his lips forward, ruefully. "Anyway. But that's exactly what she said to me when I was fucking her."

The two brothers shook their heads and smiled at each other.

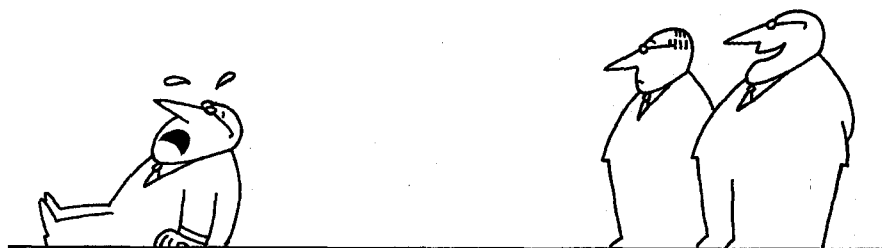
"Incredible."

"It is. Fucking incredible."

And they starting comparing notes about Agnieszka in bed.

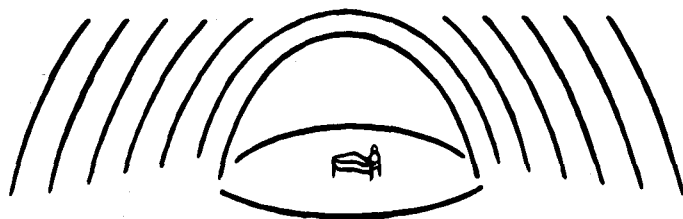
Three weeks later, the affair began again. In spite of everything. And in spite of everything Piotr still believed that we are mayflies who only live for an afternoon.

Nothing more was heard about Agnieszka's tumor. ♦



"Oh, sure, that could be us tomorrow, but it's him today."

THE CRITICS



THE ART WORLD

ROUGH STUFF

A Francis Bacon retrospective at the Met.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Francis Bacon has long been my least favorite great painter of the twentieth century. My notes from a visit to the new Bacon retrospective, which is very handsomely installed at the Metropolitan Museum, seethe with indignation, which I will now try to get over. It's unseemly to stay mad at an artist whose canonical stature, as graphed by the fervor of intelligent admirers, not to mention market value, has only grown since his death, in 1992, at the age of eighty-two. But first I must file away my accumulated objections to the theatrical shock tactics with which Bacon, in the nineteen-forties, aimed to create museum-worthy European painting that could stand up to that of his hero, Picasso. An old politics of style hovers. Bacon opposed American Abstract Expressionism, scorning Jackson Pollock's manner as "old lace" and Mark Rothko's as "rather dismal variations on colour." I have liked to believe that, in the mid-century contest for a radically new and befitting Western art, my countrymen played fair, and Bacon cheated. They forged integral styles that absorbed and transcended Impressionism and Cubism, engulfing rather than just addressing the eye. He vamped with an eclectic mix of Expressionist tactics and decorative longueurs. But I'm aware that the scorekeeping applies to a game not won or lost but called on account of rain—proliferating points of view that have swamped all would-be authoritative accounts of art history along with those of history, period.

In fact, it is Bacon, rather than the Abstract Expressionists, who now looks prophetic about subsequent developments in art, starting with Pop and continuing through the so-called Pictures Generation, the worthy subject of a concurrent exhibition at the Met. The key is his pioneering use of photographs and printed sources for his subject matter. To make his well-known, mordant takeoffs on Velázquez's "Portrait of Pope Innocent X" (circa 1650), beginning in the early nineteen-fifties, he worked from reproductions, passing up opportunities to view the original in Rome during an extended stay there. Bacon also exerts an influence on young artists of today, such as Peter Doig and other friskily decadent British-educated painters. So here goes a rearguard skirmish, on behalf of Pollock and Rothko—and of Willem de Kooning, who, like Bacon, was a self-conscious inheritor of European tradition, an Oedipal scion of Picasso, and lingeringly a figurative artist, despite his achievements in abstraction.

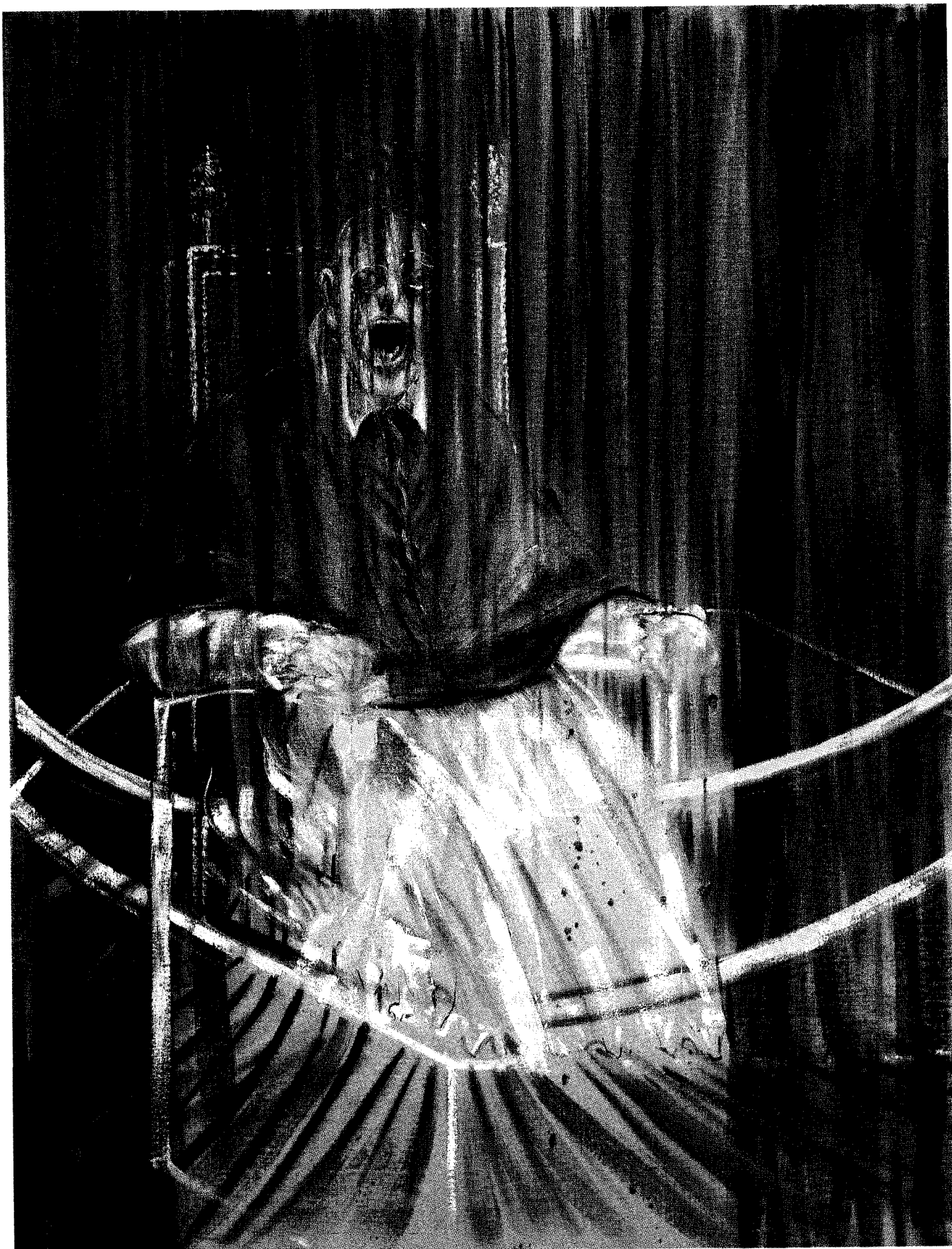
Bacon was born in Ireland, in 1909, the son of a cutlery heiress and a military man who raised horses. As a teen-ager, Bacon was flamboyantly effeminate, and his behavior enraged his father, who, according to a story reported by a friend, the novelist Caroline Blackwood, had him horsewhipped by grooms. By 1926—spottily educated, having run away from boarding school—he was living in London on an allowance from his mother, supplemented by petty theft and, a bit later, by occasional largesse from enam-

ored older men. Jobs as a valet and a telephone answerer, for a dress company, were brief. Bacon read eagerly—Nietzsche, Eliot—and knocked around London, Berlin, and Paris. He was excited by Russian Revolutionary and Surrealist films. A show of works by Picasso in Paris in 1928 fired an artistic ambition that would sputter until the war years. Among the few early works he did not destroy is the first in the Met show: "Crucifixion" (1933), a vaguely Picassoesque figure, also reminiscent of work by a mentoring friend, Graham Sutherland, in ghostly white-on-black. The religious reference is not pious. All his life, in the words of his most devoted critic, the eloquent David Sylvester, Bacon was "an old-fashioned militant atheist who always seemed to be looking for pretexts to issue a reminder that God was dead and to bang a few nails into his coffin." He made a compensatory sacrament of a penchant for rugged sex, alcohol, and gambling.

In 1929, all of twenty years old, he set up as an interior designer in London. He enjoyed immediate success, recognized in an issue of a leading magazine devoted to "The 1930 Look in British Decoration," but, in a decade of abundant social and erotic doings, he stuck with nothing for long. When war came, in 1939, asthma got him excused from the military and then, tormented by dusty air during the Blitz, from a civil-service position. At a house in South Kensington, his major work commenced. Here I glide past immense quantities of biography, amounting to an alternately exalted and gutter picaresque, which, in writings about Bacon, make him seem as much a literary character as a working artist. While his work is routinely celebrated as an authentic reaction to the horrors and the dislocations of the Second World War, it can come off, in the telling, as a pageant of hangovers and refractory lovers. He remains, in death, the raffish celebrity that he was in life; a meticulous recreation of one of his incredibly cluttered studios, in which a book of Velázquez lies near a beefcake magazine, lures tourists to the municipal Hugh Lane Gallery, in Dublin.

In 1943, Bacon painted "Figure Getting Out of a Car," derived from a photograph of Hitler. It centers on a naked, long-necked lump, whose head is all toothy maw. This seminal picture is not

ABOVE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; OPPOSITE: © ESTATE OF FRANCIS BACON/ARS, NY/COURTESY DES MOINES ART CENTER



Bacon's "Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X" (1953), one of a series of mordant takeoffs.

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at the Met, but variations of the figure, on orange grounds, dominate a triptych, "Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion" (circa 1944), which announces Bacon's vision of an age of monstrosity. "Painting" (1946), from the Museum of Modern Art, renders a crucified victim as sides of beef. Some screaming Popes of the early fifties are striated with vertical bands suggested by Albert Speer's cathedral of searchlights for a Nazi rally. Writing in 1948, Sylvester detected in Bacon's style a redolence of the sixteenth-century painter Matthias Grünewald's "germanic temperament of epileptic delirium." In ways comparable to but ranging beyond those of his existentialist contemporary Alberto Giacometti, Bacon mobilized an emotion of energetic, strangely energizing despair. He regularly proclaimed his allegiance to primal drives as the only credible substitute for meaning in a hostile universe. (But did he have to be quite so enthusiastic about it?)

Bacon's striking formal innovations, in handlings of pictorial space, include swiftly limned cubical enclosures and evocations of proscenium stages, in which single figures—or paired figures interwoven in paroxysms of sex and/or death—leap to the eye. Marvellously snarling knots of brushwork in the figures are increasingly offset by flat grounds and, at times, by overlaid geometrical ciphers, such as graphic arrows. The critic Lawrence Gowing wrote, approvingly, that Bacon hatched a look "at once of pastiche and of iconoclasm." It's on this point that I rebel in favor of, particularly, de Kooning's hardly less ferocious "Women" paintings, which observe the imperative, shared by all the Abstract Expressionists, to reconcile figure and ground. Bacon spoke of "a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa," but he attained that effect only in isolated passages, surrounded by dead space. His paintings, despite their extraordinary visual drama, thus lack a de Kooning-esque sense of scale, which knits visible brushstrokes to the proportions of the canvas and relates the whole to the viewer's body. Big or small, the size of a Bacon feels arbitrary. With a few exceptions—such as some van Gogh-inspired painterly thunderstorms that he made in the late nineteen-fifties,

and which I wish he had built on—they are illustrational: tissues of fiction, or caricature, that complete themselves in literary imagination.

Not that there's anything wrong with illustration. That's the retroactive mercy of regarding Bacon in the light of Pop art and of later grapplings, by artists including the Pictures crew, with the tyranny of mechanical reproduction in contemporary culture. The most crucial tension of Bacon's style, between life mediated by received images and life suffered in the flesh, can be awfully heady. In one of his caustic moods, he pronounced ninety-five per cent of people "fools about painting." He complained, "Hardly anyone really feels about painting: they read things into it." I disagree, except in cases, like Bacon's, where reading things in can seem pretty much the *modus operandi*. With a Pollock or a Rothko, you either feel about painting or have nothing to engage you. But I find myself persuaded that Bacon did identify with the visceral sorcery of paint—though he wouldn't maintain it across any whole canvas—and that he wanted us to perceive that fact, even as he perversely threw melodramatic scenarios in the way.

A sense of dilemma leads me to reconsider a feature of his art that I have regarded as finicky and precious: his insistence that all his paintings be displayed behind glass, in gold frames. The only reason I could surmise for this was that Bacon used glass as a prosthetic gloss to unify his lurchingly fragmented surfaces. But having witnessed, at the Met, the gleaming parade of his career, I begin to understand the policy as a poignant gesture that weds decorative chic to fierce aspiration. Reflecting in more ways than one, the framing registers the viewer's physical presence and, abstractly, the hermetic fate of Western painting, fallen from the Renaissance into a state of besiegement by cameras and printing presses. Bacon's paintings objectify the subjective ordeal of perishing bodies that harbor immortal longings. In this, the paintings are indeed great, standing for a historical condition even of people who can't abide them. ♦

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Peter Schjeldahl narrates a Bacon slide show.

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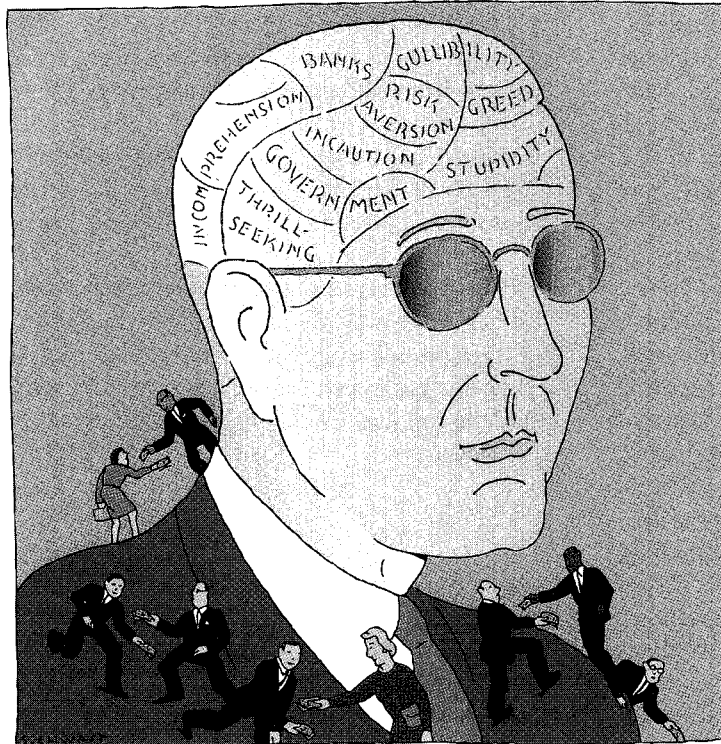
High finance vs. human nature.

BY JOHN LANCHESTER

The world of banking, it's becoming clear, operates according to different norms from those of the rest of the business world. Take the off-site corporate weekend. Normal behavior on these occasions consists of punishing the minibar and nursing consequent hangovers, hitting on long-fancied colleagues, and putting embarrassing items, ideally pornographic videos, on one another's hotel bills. For form's sake, a few new ideas are cooked up, and then gradually allowed to die a natural death when everyone is back at work and liver-function levels have stabilized. In June, 1994, when a team from J. P. Morgan went on an off-site weekend to Boca Raton, they conformed to normative behavior in certain respects. Binge drinking occurred; a senior colleague's nose was broken; somebody charged a trashed Jet Ski and many cheeseburgers to somebody else's account. Where the J. P. Morgan team broke with tradition was in coming up with a real idea—an idea that changed the entire nature of modern banking, with consequences that are currently rocking the planet.

The new idea was based on an old one, that of the swap. Say you're in the grocery business, and feel gloomy about your prospects. Your immediate neighbor is in the stationery business, and he feels gloomy about his prospects, less so about yours. You get to talking, and one of you hits on a brilliant idea: why not just swap revenues? You take his earnings for the year, and he takes

yours. The actual business doesn't change hands, making the swap, in banking terminology, "synthetic." The first currency swap took place in 1981, and allowed I.B.M. to trade surplus Swiss francs and Deutsche marks for dollars held by the World Bank. The two institutions exchanged their obligations to bondholders and their bond



Complex risk engineering ignored emotions like avarice and envy.

earnings without actually exchanging the bonds. The deal, brokered by Salomon Brothers, was worth two hundred and ten million dollars over ten years and ushered in a whole new field of finance. As Gillian Tett tells it in her book "Fool's Gold" (Free Press; \$26), by the time of the Boca Raton off-site, swaps had become a roaringly successful feature of the banking world: the volume of such interest-rate and currency derivatives was worth twelve trillion dollars, more than the entire U.S. economy.

But competition was making those swap deals less profitable. The quest was for a new, and therefore newly lucrative, product to sell. What got the J. P. Morgan team rolling was this thought: instead of swapping bonds or currency or interest rates, why not swap the risk of default? In effect, it could sell the risk that a borrower won't be able to pay back his debt. Since banking is based on making loans to customers, the risk of default by those customers is a crucial part of the business. A product that made it possible to reduce that risk—by selling it to somebody else—had the potential to create a gigantic new market.

The broad outline of the financial crash is becoming well known. The value of Gillian Tett's book is in the level of detail with which she tells the story, concentrating on the specific sequence of inventions and innovations that made it possible. Tett, a *Financial Times* reporter who covered the credit markets, was one of the few people to have seen the implosion coming. A critical factor was that she has a Ph.D. in social anthropology—a "hippie" background, as one banker told her, intending no compliment. It helped her focus on what she calls "social silences" in the world of banking. It's not always what people say that contains the most important information; often, it's what they

take for granted. To Tett, it was obvious that the banking sector was running irresponsibly large risks in the overexpansion of credit and the overingenuity of its financial engineering. So she was perfectly placed to follow the story as it happened, and to pull together the story of how we got here. There are a number of different ways of peeling this particular onion; Tett does so through the J. P. Morgan team that helped create the new credit derivatives. These lie at the heart of the current crisis, and Tett's account of

their invention and dispersal makes "Fool's Gold" a gripping and indispensable book.

The Boca Raton meeting first bore fruit when Exxon needed to open a line of credit to cover potential damages of five billion dollars resulting from the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. J. P. Morgan was reluctant to turn down Exxon, which was an old client, but the deal would tie up a lot of reserve cash to provide for the risk of the loans going bad. The so-called Basel rules, named for the town in Switzerland where they were formulated, required that the banks hold eight per cent of their capital in reserve against the risk of outstanding loans. That limited the amount of lending bankers could do, the amount of risk they could take on, and therefore the amount of profit they could make. But, if the risk of the loans could be sold, it logically followed that the loans were now risk-free; and, if that were the case, what would have been the reserve cash could now be freely loaned out. No need to suck up useful capital.

In late 1994, Blythe Masters, a member of the J. P. Morgan swaps team, pitched the idea of selling the credit risk to the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development. So, if Exxon defaulted, the E.B.R.D. would be on the hook for it—and, in return for taking on the risk, would receive a fee from J. P. Morgan. Exxon would get its credit line, and J. P. Morgan would get to honor its client relationship but also to keep its credit lines intact for sexier activities. The deal was so new that it didn't even have a name: eventually, the one settled on was "credit-default swap."

So far, so good for J. P. Morgan. But the deal had been laborious and time-consuming, and the bank wouldn't be able to make real money out of credit-default swaps until the process became streamlined and industrialized. The invention that allowed all this to happen was securitization. Traditionally, banking involves a case-by-case assessment of the risk of every loan, and it's hard to industrialize that process. What securitization did was bundle together a package of these loans, and then rely on safety in numbers and

MY HERO

It's O.K. to keep hearing your worries, so long as you stop talking to them. Shun them like a double-crossed Quaker.

Imagine how quiet it would be, like shutting off the droning ocean. That's how our parasites must feel about our hearts. What a racket, all that pumping. Shut up shut up.

Cicero said Chrysippus said that the life in a pig is a preservative, keeping it fresh until we want to eat it. What then is life in us?

Chrysippus wrote more than seven hundred books, none survive. (We have his bio in the Diogenes Laertius "Lives," and small comments like the one Cicero preserved, about the pig.)

Imagine how much the man talked. Imagine how his daughters felt, sitting in cafés, virgins listening to young lawyers. Lawyer

ready to move from mom to virgin ears, to part the aural curtain to the heart of the flesh, to grease up and force his listener to stay,

pressure like a fork, squeezed down inner tubes to hidden narrow chambers. The daughters, who could not listen anymore, worked into first-date conversation, "Of course I've had it in the ear before."

There were no second dates. Fierce Chrysippus sisters, full of hate. There were no surrenders. That's why I'm so tender about my resignation. Because all these years later a nation of one feels like one too many. Caesar was tough, but not by himself did he conquer Gaul. The superlative for all alone is all.

—Jennifer Michael Hecht

the law of averages: even if some loans did default, the others wouldn't, and would keep the stream of revenue going, thereby diffusing and minimizing the risk of default. So there would be two sources of revenue: one from the sale of the loans, and another from the steady flow of repayments. Then someone had the idea of dividing up the securities into different levels of risk—a technique called tranching—and selling them off accordingly, so that riskier tranches of debt would pay a higher rate of interest than safer ones. Bill Demchak, a "structured finance" star at J. P. Morgan, took the lead in creating bundles of credit-default swaps—insurance against default—and selling them to investors. The investors would get the streams of revenue, according to the risk-and-reward level they chose; the bank would get insurance against

its loans, and fees for setting up the deal.

There was one final component to the J. P. Morgan team's invention. The team set up a kind of offshore shell company, called a Special Purpose Vehicle, to fulfill the role supplied by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in the first credit-default swap. The shell company would assume \$9.7 billion of J. P. Morgan's risk (in this case, outstanding loans that the bank had made to some three hundred companies) and sell off that risk to investors, in the form of securities paying differing rates of interest. According to J. P. Morgan's calculations, the underlying loans were so safe that it needed to collect only seven hundred million dollars in order to cover the \$9.7-billion debt. In 1997, the credit agency

Moodys agreed, and a whole new era in banking dawned. J. P. Morgan had found a way to shift risk off its books while simultaneously generating income from that risk, and freeing up capital to lend elsewhere. It was magic. The only thing wrong with it was the name, BISTRO, for Broad Index Secured Trust Offering, which made the new rocket-science financial instrument sound like a place you went to for steak frites. The market came to prefer a different term: "synthetic collateralized debt obligations."

Inevitably, J. P. Morgan's innovation was taken up by more aggressive and less cautious banks. Mortgage-based versions of collateralized debt obligations were especially profitable. These C.D.O.s involved the techniques that the J. P. Morgan team had developed, but their underlying assets were pools of mortgages—many of them based on the most lucrative mortgages, the now notorious subprime loans, which paid higher than usual rates of interest. (These new instruments could be pretty exotic: some consisted of C.D.O.s of C.D.O.s, pools of pools of debt.) J. P. Morgan was wary of them, as it happens, because it didn't see how the risks were being engineered down to a safe level. But institutions like Citigroup, U.B.S., and Merrill Lynch plunged in.

The new financial instruments, as clever as they were, had an unfortunate side effect: they broke banking. At its heart, banking is a simple business. Customers deposit money at a bank, in return for interest; the bank lends that money to other people, at a higher rate of interest. This isn't glamorous or interesting, but banking is not supposed to resemble skydiving or hip-hop; what recommends it is that it's a good way of making steady money (and of creating credit in the economy), as long as the bank is careful about whom it lends money to. The quality of the loans is critical, because those loans are the bank's earning assets.

This isn't some incidental issue; it's the very core of what banking is. But the model of packaging plus securitization spurned the principle that a bank had to individually assess and monitor every loan. The mathematics of valua-

tion models—horrendously complex equations to assess probabilities and correlations, cooked up in mad-scientist style by the firms' "quants"—took on the burden of assessing statistical risk. The idea that a banker looks a borrower in the eye and takes a view on whether he can trust him came to seem laughably nineteenth-century. As for the risks? Well, as Lawrence Summers said when he was Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, "The parties to these kinds of contract are largely sophisticated financial institutions that would appear to be eminently capable of protecting themselves from fraud and counterparty insolvencies."

Alas, Richard A. Posner, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, observes with pointed restraint, "That turned out not to be true." The result has been, in the title phrase of Posner's new book, "A Failure of Capitalism" (Harvard; \$23.95). He argues that we are now in a bona-fide depression, which he defines as "a steep reduction in output that causes or threatens to cause deflation and creates widespread public anxiety and, among the political and economic elites, a sense of crisis that evokes extremely costly efforts at remediation." His book is an attempt to write "a concise, constructive, jargon- and acronym-free, non-technical, unsensational, light-on-anecdote, analytical examination of the major facets of the biggest U.S. economic disaster in my lifetime and that of most people living today."

Accounts of the banking-and-credit crisis tend to focus their explanations, which usually also means their blame, on one or more of the following four factors: greed, stupidity, government, and the banks. The process resembles a children's game in which you spin an arrow and it lands on a word. Tett spins twice, and lands on greed and the banks; Posner suggests that he doesn't know what the word "greed" means, and his spin lands firmly on government. "We are learning from it that we need a more active and intelligent government to keep our model of a capitalist economy from running off the rails," he writes. "The movement to deregulate the financial industry went too far by exag-

gerating the resilience—the self-healing powers—of laissez-faire capitalism."

This isn't an original conclusion, but the way Posner arrives at it is new and bracing. His first claim to fame was as one of the founders of a school of thought that takes economic ideas and techniques and applies them to the law, as well as to life more generally. He has published nearly twenty books in just the past decade, a superhuman rate of productivity, bearing in mind that Posner is also a practicing judge, a senior lecturer at the University of Chicago, and an energetic blogger (in association with the Nobel Prize-winning economist Gary Becker). He has the rare kind of mind that is a pure pleasure to watch in action, regardless of the subject and the argument being made.

"A Failure of Capitalism" argues that the risks taken by the banks were rational, for two main reasons. First, it's only with the benefit of hindsight that we can know that a bubble in prices was taking place. Bankers had to assign a probability to the prospect that there was a bubble, and, second, to the prospect that, if there was a bubble and it burst, house prices would fall by twenty per cent or more—this being the decline that precipitated the general crisis of bank insolvency. Now, suppose that the risk of both things happening was one per cent. Whether an event with that likelihood is worth worrying about depends on what its consequences will be. From the larger point of view, the consequences included systemic meltdown; but Posner invites us to focus our attention on what they looked like for individual bankers. They had strong incentives for taking the maximum amount of risks in their lending, since risks are correlated with rewards, and the bankers were so well paid that they didn't really have to worry about being laid off. "The greater the gains are from taking risks that enable very high short-term profits, and the better cushioned the executive is by his severance package against the cost of losing his job, the more risks he rationally will take," Posner notes. Besides, if a bank avoids these risks, and its competitors don't and therefore make more money during the boom, the

cautious bank risks going out of business anyway, because its clients will walk away.

People taking out what now look like crazily risky mortgage loans were being rational, too, because they were acting on the widespread assumption that house prices would continue rising. If house prices fell, well, tough luck, they'd walk away from the loan and go bankrupt—but they probably had lousy credit ratings anyway. “Thus the downside of the home buyer's speculative investment is truncated, making his ‘reckless’ behavior not only rational but also consistent with his being well informed about the risks,” Posner writes. The conclusion: “Risky behavior of the sort I have been describing was individually rational during the bubble. But it was collectively irrational.” As for the idea that the bankers were dumb to get so carried away: “I am skeptical that readily avoidable mistakes, failures of rationality, or the intellectual deficiencies of financial managers whose IQs exceed my own were major factors in the economic collapse. Had the mistakes that brought down the banking industry been *readily* avoidable, they would have been avoided.”

This is a familiar place for these arguments to end up: economists often find that apparently erratic behavior is, at heart, rational. It helps that the definition of rationality can be stretched to include emotion, which “is not necessarily or even typically irrational,” Posner argues. Reckless greed, incompetent assessments of probability, blindness to the inevitability of downturns, failure to hedge risks so big that they threaten a firm's very existence: all are rational.

It seems a pity that a man as unflinching as Posner didn't put his ideas under more pressure from the specifics of what the bankers did. He is willing to criticize those who have criticized bankers—“the distinguished economist Paul Krugman,” for instance, “who should know better”—but no banker is named and blamed. One can regret that Posner didn't get the chance to read Tett's book, which offers the opportunity to assess in detail the kind of risks that the bankers were taking.

Blythe Masters, who was in charge

of the Exxon Valdez deal, and of selling the very first BISTRO notes, and thus one of the creators of the entire credit-default-swap industry, was among those baffled by the C.D.O. boom. “How are the other banks doing it?” she asked. “How are they making so much money?” The answer, Tett says, is that “she was so steeped in the ways of J. P. Morgan that it never occurred to her that the other banks might simply ignore all the risk controls J. P. Morgan had adhered to. That they might do so was simply outside her cognitive map.”

In particular, those banks had accumulated huge amounts of super-senior debt. In the first BISTRO, remember, only seven hundred million dollars was reserved to cover \$9.7 billion of risk. The remainder of the debt was regarded as marvellously safe. Bankers call that kind of debt “super-senior,” i.e., better than AAA grade, safer than U.S. Treasury bills, so secure that it didn't need to be insured. So what to do with it? Some banks simply let the super-senior debt accumulate on their balance sheets. The amount of this debt “was a closely guarded secret, even within the banks themselves,” Tett writes, and the collapse in their value helped bring down the big banks. It would be interesting to read Posner's analysis of these specific actions, which to the layman seem, as they seemed to so many of the J. P. Morgan team, insanely reckless.

A common mistake of very smart people is to assume that other people's minds work in the same way that theirs do. This is a particular problem in economics. Its mathematically based models and assumptions of rational conduct can appear, to non-economists, like toys, entertaining but, by definition, of limited utility. Even Posner, who spent years extending the purview of economic thought, thinks that “the depression is a wake-up call to the economics profession.” It's no surprise to find the Yale economist Robert J. Shiller as one of the first respondents to that call. Shiller—not content with having predicted the bursting of the dot-com bubble in his book “Irrational Exuberance”; co-creating the standard measure for tracking house prices, the Case-Shiller index; going on

the record with worries about the housing bubble as early as 2003; and writing one of the first books on the crash, “The Subprime Solution,” in 2008—has now, with George A. Akerlof, the 2001 Nobel winner in economics, co-written a book on the influence of emotions on economics. “Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism” (Princeton; \$24.95) takes its title from John Maynard Keynes, who, in a famous passage of his 1936 treatise “The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money,” mused about how businessmen manage to make decisions, given the level of uncertainty about the future. “Our basis of knowledge for estimating the yield ten years hence of a railway, a copper mine, a textile factory, the goodwill of a patent medicine, an Atlantic liner, a building in the City of London amounts to little and sometimes to nothing,” he wrote. We can't know the future, and therefore our inclination to act, to do things, “can only be taken as a result of animal spirits—of a spontaneous urge to action rather than inaction.” Akerlof and Shiller extrapolate from this an idea of animal spirits encompassing “noneconomic motives and irrational behaviors,” a slightly broader idea than Keynes's usage, but one that allows them to study a range of negative impulses as well as the basic urge to optimism about which Keynes was talking.

“Animal Spirits” is addressed to a general reader, but it's hard not to feel that the book's real audience is among economists. The general reader needs no persuading about the influence of non-rational, non-economic forces on economic thinking. Within the economic profession, however, the subject of strict rationality is the occasion of a permanent pitched battle. (Posner: “The very existence of warring schools within a field is a clue that the field is weak, however brilliant its practitioners.”) “Animal Spirits,” like “A Failure of Capitalism,” is a campaigning maneuver in this ongoing struggle.

Akerlof and Shiller have a set of specific proposals for how the animal spirits might be incorporated into their science. They set out a framework of

factors—Confidence (and the lack thereof), Fairness, Corruption and Bad Faith, Money Illusion (the failure to understand the impact of inflation), and Stories—and then apply their ideas to a series of specific questions. Some of this is very timely, such as a chapter on “The Current Financial Crisis” and one asking “Why Are Financial Prices and Corporate Investments So Volatile?” But it’s clear that the great white whale of modern economics, a thing that would appease the descendants of both Milton Friedman and John Maynard Keynes, is a quantifiable, evidence-based theory of how bubbles are formed, and, hence, how to forestall them. Bubbles are irrefutably clear in hindsight; but an economist who found a way of proving their presence with foresight would be doing humanity a profound favor.

We aren’t there yet, though Akerlof and Shiller’s book does give the profession some suggestions for the search. There is barely a page of “Animal Spirits” without a fascinating fact or insight, and by no means all from a reflexively liberal viewpoint. One of their culprits for the crisis is Andrew Cuomo, who, as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, sharply increased the mandated lending to underserved communities by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and in the process lowered credit standards, thus making it “easy for mortgage lenders to justify loosening their own lending standards.” Despite the various ideological and methodological differences with Richard Posner, Akerlof and Shiller’s fundamental view of how capitalism should work is similar: “What allows capitalism to function is the regulations,” they write. This should be an enduring lesson of the crisis—an understanding that the rules governing the operating of markets were not handed down on stone tablets but are made by men, and are in constant need of revision, supervision, and active, imaginative enforcement. All these books coincide on this point: human beings make markets. A general recognition of that fact, led by the economic profession and taken to heart by politicians, would be a step so important as to be almost worth what it has cost to be reminded of it. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

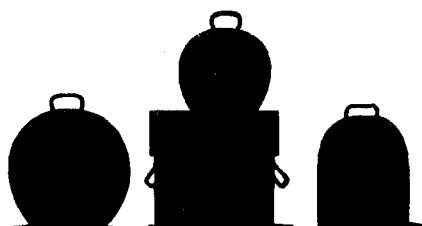
Brooklyn, by Colm Tóibín (Scribner; \$25). Tóibín’s brief novel, following his bravura rendering of the life of Henry James in “The Master,” seems modest at first. A diligent young woman with few opportunities in nineteen-fifties Ireland is packed off by her family to Brooklyn, where she works in a department store, goes to church and night school, and acquires a boyfriend, before a family crisis presents her with a stark choice between her new life and her old one. Within these confines, Tóibín creates a narrative of remarkable power, writing with a sparseness and intensity that give the minutest shades of feeling immense emotional impact. Seen through his protagonist’s cautious eyes, even hackneyed tropes of Brooklyn life, such as trips to Ebbets Field and Coney Island, take on a subtle strangeness. Purging the immigrant novel of all swagger and sentimentality, Tóibín leaves us with a renewed understanding that to emigrate is to become a foreigner in two places at once.

Wanting, by Richard Flanagan (Atlantic Monthly; \$24). Flanagan sets his novel in the wilds of nineteenth-century Tasmania and evokes its inhabitants with exquisite precision: a silver-haired sawyer’s hands are “like a sea eagle’s nest made of gnarled eucalypt branches”; a stolid bureaucratic type is “mastiff-faced, full-bodied and goose-bellied, heavy in all things—opinion, sensibility, morality and conversation.” The narrative scope is ambitious; we move between the story of a young Aboriginal woman wrenched from her family by the broody and bored wife of the British governor, and an account of Charles Dickens’s extramarital affairs. The connection between the two is slight (Dickens co-wrote a play about the governor’s ill-fated search for the northwest passage), but Flanagan forges from them

an entirely unified meditation on desire, “the cost of its denial, the centrality and force of its power in human affairs.”

The Brother Gardeners, by Andrea Wulf (Knopf; \$35). In Wulf’s engaging account, the origin of the English country garden appears as a matter of friendship as much as of flowers—a collaborative effort between two men and two countries. In 1733, a humble American farmer, John Bartram, sent seeds of plants native to the American colonies to a London cloth merchant, Peter Collinson, who went on to lead a dedicated group of British enthusiasts in introducing American species to Britain. Previously, English gardens had been dominated by turf, topiary, and strict geometric rules; the arrival of new plants well suited to the climate transformed them into places of movement and color, and a source of immense national pride. That such a quintessentially English obsession should have its roots in foreign soil is an irony not lost on Wulf, a design historian who grew up in Germany.

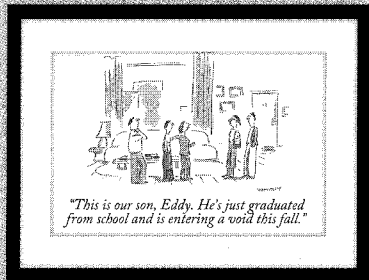
Beaumarchais, by Maurice Lever, translated from the French by Susan Emanuel (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$35). Best known as the author of the comedies that became Mozart’s “The Marriage of Figaro” and Rossini’s “The Barber of Seville,” Beaumarchais was a high-spirited adventurer for whom writing plays was only an “honest relaxation.” This erudite and wry biography covers the full range of his occupations, including watchmaking, espionage, pamphleteering, and transatlantic trade. Born into a modest family, he clambered into court society largely through charm and smart taste in consorts; even the name Beaumarchais was borrowed from one of his wives. But social success didn’t blunt his populist instincts or the “insane courage” with which he expressed them. One play derided the nobility for taking “the trouble to be born and nothing else,” and it was as much sympathy with democratic ideals as desire for profit, Lever argues, that led Beaumarchais to supply guns for the American Revolution.



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THE THEATRE

CATNIP

Wallace Shawn's first new play in more than a decade.

BY JOHN LAHR

London's Royal Court Theatre has made this spring a Wallace Shawn season. In addition to showing Shawn's cult movies "My Dinner with Andre" (1981) and "Vanya on 42nd Street" (1994), the theatre has staged his 1990 one-man show, "The Fever" (with the estimable Clare Higgins taking on Shawn's role), his 1985 play "Aunt Dan and Lemon," and Shawn's first new play in more than a decade, "Grasses of a Thousand Colors," in which the pug-nosed provocateur himself performs the central part. This is a big deal. The Royal Court, one of the most influential theatres in Europe, is doing for Shawn what the Beatles did for Little Richard: rediscovering for a new generation a singular American talent who had been marginalized in his own country. In the United States, Shawn, as a playwright, is a relatively unknown quantity without an artistic home; in England, his works, which prey on both consciousness and conscience, are published under the rubric of "contemporary classics."

"What do you think a human being is?" Shawn asks in "The Fever." "A human being happens to be an unprotected little wriggling creature . . . without a shell or a hide or even any fur, just thrown out onto the earth like an eye that's been pulled from its socket, like a shucked oyster that's trying to crawl along the ground. We need to build our own shells." In life and onstage, Shawn's carapace of congeniality is rock solid. An aesthete and an intellect, he dissimulates the rigor of his fierce brain and the clout of his princely pedigree—his father was for thirty-five years the editor of this magazine—behind a droll mask of tentative comic collapse: he's a wolf in schlub's clothing.

At the beginning of the three-hour "Grasses of a Thousand Colors" (superbly directed by André Gregory), Shawn is at it again: he stands before us as Ben, a scientist and a memoirist, in a black dressing gown, black monogrammed slippers, and black cravat, and plays his familiar wrong-

footing game of self-deprecation. He is dressed as an agent of darkness, but he is bright with good will. "Well. Hello, everybody. Hello! Hello there!" he says, in his lisping, halting, high-pitched voice. He goes on, "When you're all so nicely sitting there and listening to me, I'm deriving a great deal of pleasure from each and every one of you, as if you were chocolates I was eating." In this futuristic dream play, eating and being eaten are important leitmotifs. Ben, we learn, is one of the barbarians who have devoured the planet, and, beneath his charm, he is as unrepentant as a hedge-fund manager. "Loaves, with Fishes, for Dinner" is the title of the memoir from which he reads to us, and which hints at his majestic self-infatuation.

Ben is perhaps the most unreliable of Shawn's many unreliable narrators. His smugness—"I was born lucky"—is rivalled only by the imperialism of his convictions. "We're fixers, improvers," he says of his optimistic generation. The thing that he has fixed, it turns out, is the "problem of food." As he pompously puts it, "There was, on the one hand, an enormous crowd of entities—ourselves and others—roaming the planet, trying to sustain themselves, or, in other words, looking for something to eat; and on the other hand there was a tiny, inadequate crowd of entities available on the planet to be eaten." The appliance of Ben's science allows the animal kingdom—frogs, cows, his own dog, Rufus, and, by implication, *Homo sapiens*—to feed on its own kind, as well as on the corpses of other animals. The discovery has made him rich; it has also destroyed the food chain. Things have gone disastrously wrong: animals are dying, and people are vomiting and keeling over.

Unnerving memory flashes of his first wife, Cerise (Miranda Richardson)—brilliantly designed by Bill Morrison to resemble surrealist Rayographs, which are projected onto the entire back wall of the stage—haunt Ben with news of the sickening world. Cerise reminisces nostalgically

cally about the time when “people ate and digested the same foods for their whole lives.” Blond hair piled on top of her head, her legs and face lightly brushed with glitter, she then enters magically through the back wall and slithers over the back of the sofa and onto Ben’s lap. As Richardson piquantly plays her, Cerise is at once lithe and lethal, as cool, mercurial, and flirty as a cat; in fact, in Shawn’s fairy tale she is half cat, half human. “Cats *like* to tease mice. They like to play with them a little. Are you with me so far?” she asks when she enters, adding, “And, of course, everyone knows that cats *punish* mice.”

With her talk of the “good old days” of shrimp and asparagus, Cerise certainly punishes Ben; he throws his memoir into the trash and, in the following two acts, escapes from the toxic environment he has helped engineer into an unrivalled, often hilarious saga of priapic pleasure. Not since Barry Humphries’s well-hung Sir Les Patterson, with his mythic “frequently felt tip,” has the male organ received such eloquent and side-splitting objectification. Ben’s tale is an epic account of the battles of his penis, a sort of Iliad of onanism. “My erect penis is monstrous, actually—it looks violent, extreme, almost out of control,” he says. “And yet, particularly when it’s in repose and completely relaxed, I do think my friend has a wonderful face. It’s so simple—no eyes, no nose, just a simple mouth—a face that looks out at the world with just a sad, hopeful smile.”

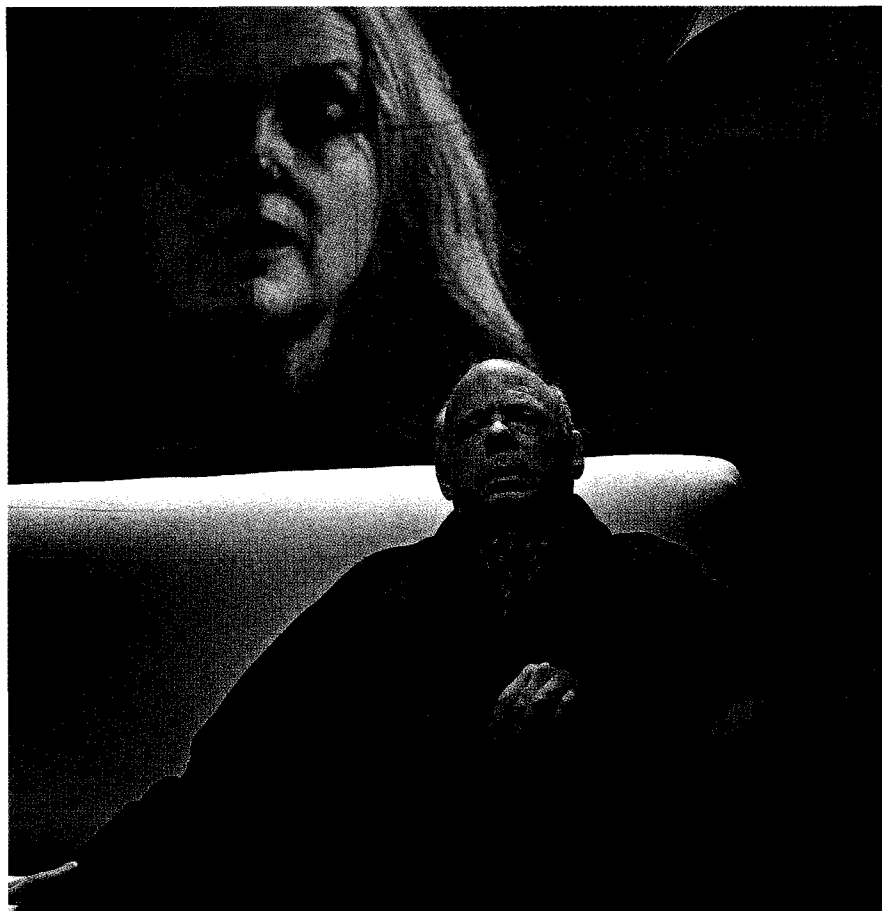
Traditional fairy tales are exercises in sublimation; in Shawn’s retelling of parts of “The White Cat,” a seventeenth-century French folktale, the impulse is turned upside down, and the id runs riot. Between his sexual bouts with Cerise and other women—the zaftig, smoky-voiced Robin (the excellent Jennifer Tilly) and the vulnerable Rose (the compelling Emily McDonnell), for whom he seems to have feelings—Ben is compelled to sneak away into the woods, where he is introduced to cat society and where he finds Dionysian ecstasy with Blanche, a long-haired white. “My God—finally. Finally, to be known, I thought, as hot sperm flowed out of me, flowing over her paw as if it would never stop,” he says. Over the course of the tale, Robin decapitates Blanche, only to have the cat’s head begin to grow back as she lugs the eviscerated carcass home. In this protean landscape, Blanche becomes a woman, and Cerise appears to become

Blanche. (The gorgeous intercut projections of Richardson as a cat with green eyes, a red collar, and whiskers make this metamorphosis all the more surreal.)

Like all dreams, “Grasses of a Thousand Colors” resists interpretation, even as it blurs the distinction between the natural and the civilized. In its imaginative dissonance, the play seems to me a model of

about people, about why things had happened, even about facts that had seemed completely indisputable.”

“I’ve decided to take a bet on my subconscious,” Shawn told the *Guardian* recently. In “Grasses of a Thousand Colors,” that bet is hedged by his collaboration with a number of expert theatrical talents. Gregory’s subtle, suggestive staging adds



Shawn as a self-obsessed scientist in “Grasses of a Thousand Colors.”

the grotesque as Edgar Allan Poe once described it: “much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the *bizarre*, something of the terrible and not a little of that which might have excited disgust.” In Shawn’s 1996 masterpiece “The Designated Mourner”—which predicted the terrorism and the philistinism of the past decade—the narrator will do anything to survive. In 2009, Shawn’s narrator, sitting at the edge of a barbarous and convulsed world with his own death partially in view, shows some small signs of humanity. By the end of the play, Ben can at least acknowledge the folly of his intellectual arrogance. “As I approached the age of sixty, I could feel the ghosts of all the things I’d never get to do, crowding around me, suffocating me,” he says. “I’d been wrong

a witty counterpoint to the torrent of Shawn’s articulate but prolix text (which would be even stronger with some muscular editing). Eugene Lee’s cunning minimal set—well lit in warm hues by Howard Harrison—is primarily a large white sofa and a back wall that is a field of high, waving grass, through which the characters vanish. The grass plays as a coda of hope. If we leave nature alone, Shawn seems to be saying, regeneration and beauty may still be possible. In the meantime, his visionary satire of decadence powerfully dramatizes our country at a spiritual tipping point. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/VIDEO

John Lahr talks to Geoffrey Rush.

FIGHTING TO SURVIVE

"Terminator Salvation" and "Jerichow."

BY ANTHONY LANE

If you arrived late for "Terminator Salvation" and missed the name of the director, at what moment would you realize that you were not watching a Mike Leigh film? I would nominate the scene in which a rusty tow truck, armed with a wrecking ball, is pursued by a riderless robot motorbike, armed with automatic machine guns. A wrecked car falls into the bike's path, at which point we are given privileged access to the display screen inside the robot's brain. We get a blood-red projection of the obstacle ahead, and with it, for a second or two, the words "Analyzing alternatives." Slide under the wreck, crash through it, or skirt around the side? I felt sorry for this anxious bike, which may have been having trouble at home, and it certainly delivers a more measured performance than some of the leading actors. Nonetheless, that brief digital readout gives the game away. The business of the film is not to tell a cogent story or earn the devotion of our sympathies but to analyze alternatives, and, when in doubt, pick whichever is louder.

Take John Connor, whose destiny is to lead the human resistance movement against the evil techno-empire of Skynet, a defense system that "became self-aware," we are told, and turned on its creators. In "Terminator 2: Judgment Day," Connor was played by Edward Furlong as wry, resourceful, and laid-back; in "Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines," he was played by Nick Stahl as a cocky wuss. And now, in "Terminator Salvation," he is played by Christian Bale as a scar-nicked warrior, consumed by a messianic belief that he can save the world by shouting. After the opening battle, he answers his radio with yelps of "Here!" and "Connor!" as though introducing himself to a befuddled and very deaf grandmother. A notorious clip, leaked to the Internet ahead of the film's release, showed Bale melting down on

the set and bawling out a member of the crew, but let's be fair; next to the finished product, that lively address feels almost Edwardian in its courtesy.

Connor is well matched, in the decibel contest, by the machines. We get snapping croconators, metallic assailants that snake through rivers and try to eat a helicopter. As for those bikes (Bale has



Christian Bale, as John Connor, leads the resistance in the latest Terminator movie.

to mount one of them, which he may have found rather demeaning after riding his nifty Bat-Pod in "The Dark Knight"), they are launched from the shins of a giant Terminator, which treads on a gas station as if trying to squash a roach. The film's director, McG, who is clearly not content with the man-size killers of the previous movies, has ordered the larger model; but it feels like a backward stomp, already spoofed this season by the towering heavy of "Monsters vs. Aliens," and, I fear, about to be outcrunched by the vast villains of "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen," the trailer for which is more exciting than McG's entire movie. At least Transformers have some color in their cheeks, whereas this disheartening saga is tinted

in duns, umbers, and unrelieved mouse-grays. There is a nice warm glow at the climax, when a Terminator gets engulfed in molten metal, but, sadly, the same thing happened to the T-1000 in "T2," and, to be frank, that liquid-orange look is *so* last century.

All of which raises the question: when, and on what possible ground, did someone decide that the Terminator franchise should be no fun to watch? Say what you like about Arnold Schwarzenegger, but there was no mistaking the gleam in his eye—a searing scarlet gleam, true, but still a gleam. He, like James Cameron, knew precisely how much irony should be folded into the line readings, and into the encounters between man and cyborg, so as to leaven

the sense of doom. That is now gone, and "Terminator Salvation" is a confused, humorless grind, with nobody, from the stars to the set designers, prepared to prick its self-importance. The narrative device that propels characters across decades is still functioning, at a pinch, with Connor managing to be older than his own father (Anton Yelchin), which could prove awkward when they come to talk about sex, and a condemned criminal named Marcus Wright (Sam Worthington) being re-animated after death and spirited to the year 2018, but it's surely not a good sign when time travel gives you a sense of déjà vu. In the words of one resister, "A person could go crazy thinking about all this." By the end, I felt as weary as the

TOMER HANUKA

Terminator whom we meet in the bowels of Skynet, and who, for some reason, wears a bandanna around his skull, like Rafael Nadal. The poor wee thing. Is he hot? Would he like a glass of water? I know the machines are self-aware, but this is ridiculous.

If the owners of the Terminator brand ever wish to revisit the Teutonic route, traversed in such crunching style by Schwarzenegger, they should take a good look at Benno Fürmann. His footsteps might not be as large as Arnie's, but he still cuts a forbidding figure, with blue eyes that could easily double as lasers. In a new German film, "Jerichow," he hardly ever starts a conversation, preferring to speak only when spoken to—like a polite child, or a prisoner in the dock. He doesn't move much, either, unless there are specific tasks to fulfill, such as loading a truck or putting his hand in a woman's mouth to stop her from crying out as they try to make silent love. (He bears a bite mark to prove it.) When he does shift a gear, into violence, it is over within seconds; watch him in a warehouse, dodging a punch, landing two hits of his own, and tripping the other guy onto his back. At that point, with equal neatness, the writer-director, Christian Petzold, cuts away, and we are left shaking and ringing, as if we had just taken a blow ourselves.

The early scenes of "Jerichow" are an object lesson in the slow release of dramatic information. Drop by drop, this man's story accrues: he is called Thomas, he was with the German Army in Afghanistan, his mother has just died, he is living alone in her house, and, apart

from that, he has nothing. He seems to have arrived, not at the end of his tether, but simply at an end, radiating dead calm where the rest of us might panic or collapse. I half-wanted this zero state to continue, so that we could observe him explore its limits; instead, the plot swings up, as I guess it must, to bar his way. He meets a local businessman, a Turkish immigrant named Ali (Hilmi Sözer), who has a string of snack bars, which he runs on a tight rein, and a German wife, Laura (Nina Hoss), who is no less under his command. Ali needs a driver—and, you sense, a friend—and Thomas fits the bill.

You know what happens next. In particular, if you know "The Postman Always Rings Twice," in either version, or Luchino Visconti's "Osessione," or the James M. Cain novel from which the three movies sprang, the shape of the tale, in which a drifter enters a dry marriage and starts a blaze, might feel all too familiar. But those were hot numbers, whereas Petzold, the most cool-headed of the younger German directors, has siphoned the steam out of the story. As in his previous film, "Yella," with its stripped-back vision of the modern workplace, the music and the editing are as sombre as the motions of the camera. Sex—curtailed, despairing, without a hint of raunch—is never the issue here. Laura and Thomas are not electing to be lovers but, at a more basic level, fighting to become living souls. At one point, they hold hands in a dark wood, like Hansel and Gretel. As for Ali, Sözer's careful performance deepens the role of the cuckold to a degree that none of the Cain movies could be bothered with. He is brutish and

unhappy (brutish *because* unhappy), doing well from his adopted land yet lying low, somehow, as if he were an illegal refugee. No wonder he is given a diagnosis of a bad heart; it clearly belongs elsewhere. "I live in a country that doesn't want me, with a woman that I bought," he says.

That last detail refers to Laura's debts, which he took on when he married her. Thomas, too, begins the movie among loan sharks, and Petzold has remarked, in a statement on the film, that not until he viewed the finished work did he realize "there is not a single scene in which money doesn't play a role." In short, "Jerichow" is the right movie at the right time—and, with its dangerous stealth, it unfolds in the right place, too, among the flat fields and the half-deserted roads of Jerichower Land, in the former East Germany. Cash is tight (almost everyone, Laura included, tries to chisel Ali out of his profits), and employment is thin on the ground. Thomas's first job, before he joins Ali, is to lie flat on a machine and pick cucumbers, his face to the soil. It's as though Petzold had crushed "The Postman Always Rings Twice" against "The Grapes of Wrath," film noir against the parched hopes of the Depression, and transplanted what was left to an unregarded corner of northern Europe, where the sunshine feels like a cruel joke. "I love you, Laura," Thomas tells her. "You can't love, if you don't have money," she says, like someone rebuking the Beatles. So compact and controlled is this fine film, with its bitter closing twist, that, against your instincts, and despite your prayers, you fear that she may be right. ♦

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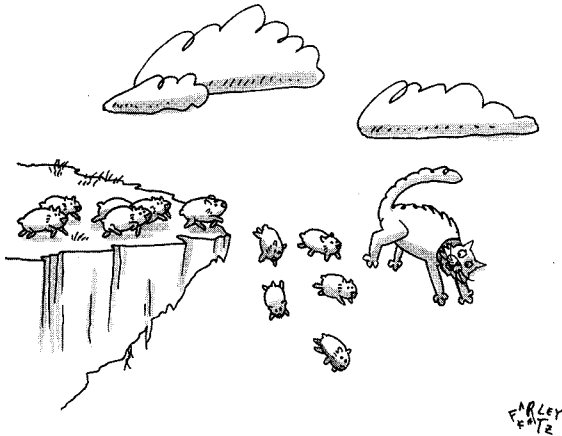
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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, May 31st. Finalists in the May 18th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 22nd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"I'm just curious—what's your excuse?"
Pinghan Chua, Alexandria, Va.



THE FINALISTS

"Free will is overrated."
Nahomi Harkavy, Greensboro, N.C.

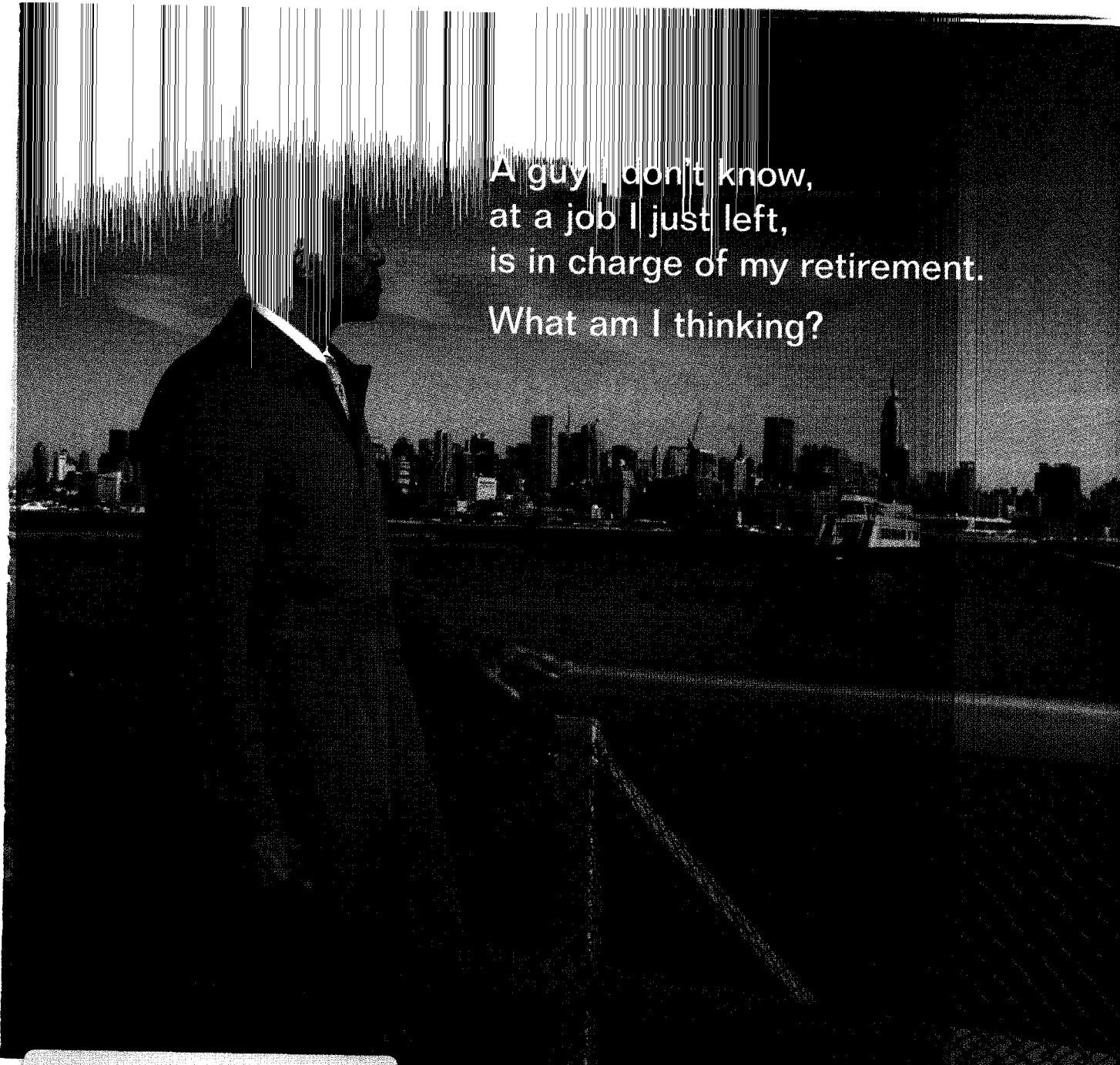
"This was so much more awkward before Craigslist."
Julie Gautreau, Knoxville, Tenn.

"This is why I suggested a threesome."
Martina O'Boyle, Atlanta, Ga.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



Shanahan



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